4-1-2017

Support for Play in Public School Kindergarten Classrooms: A Descriptive Multiple Case Study

Elizabeth M. Docken
Concordia University - Portland, edocken2@gmail.com

4-2017

Support for Play in Public School Kindergarten Classrooms: A Descriptive Multiple Case Study

Elizabeth M. Docken
Concordia University - Portland

Concordia University (Portland)

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE,

CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Elizabeth Marie Docken

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Jerry McGuire, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Sheryl Reinisch, Ed.D., Content Specialist

Julie Owens, Ed.D., Content Reader

ACCEPTED BY

Joe Mannion, Ed.D.
Provost, Concordia University, Portland

Sheryl Reinisch, Ed.D.
Dean, College of Education, Concordia University, Portland

Jerry McGuire, Ph.D.
Director of Doctoral Studies, Concordia University, Portland

SUPPORT FOR PLAY IN PUBLIC SCHOOL KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS: A DESCRIPTIVE MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

Elizabeth Marie Docken

Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Transformational Leadership

Jerry McGuire, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Sheryl Reinisch, Ed.D., Content Specialist

Julie Owens, Ed.D., Content Reader

Portland, Oregon

2017

ABSTRACT

This study explored the support for play in public school kindergarten classrooms in a single urban school district in the Northwest region of the United States. Through a three-phased data collection approach that included an online survey, in-person interviews, and classroom observations, the researcher gathered information to describe how teachers are supporting play through five key attributes: teacher perspectives, opportunities for play, the play environment, types of play, and the role of the teacher (teacher practices). The online survey was shared with all kindergarten teachers in the district, with nine survey participants who expressed high support for play selected to participate in one-on-one interviews. From the nine teachers interviewed, three were selected for classroom observations to describe support for play in the real-world context of the kindergarten classroom. The descriptive case studies of these three teachers revealed the following findings on support for play: kindergarten teachers view play as developmentally appropriate and synonymous with learning; daily opportunities are provided for free play and guided play experiences; playful kindergarten environments provide well-defined areas and organized materials for work and play; playful kindergarten classrooms support multiple types of play in child-initiated and teacher-initiated experiences; and teachers support play by creating structures and rules, responding to ensure safety, and advocating for play.

Keywords: playful learning, support for play, kindergarten

DEDICATION

For all who believe in the power of play and advocate for its rightful integration in the kindergarten classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am exceedingly grateful for the opportunity afforded me to complete this study and for the people who encouraged and supported me along the way.

My sincere appreciation to the kindergarten teachers who participated in my study, giving of their precious time and talents to provide a rich understanding of play in the classroom. Their joy and creativity were inspiring to me as a researcher and as a fellow kindergarten teacher.

My eternal gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jerry McGuire, who believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. He pushed me to keep moving forward. His expertise in qualitative research and belief in the story – in this case, the story of play – convinced me of the value of the research itself and in my ability as a researcher to weave a compelling and authentic story. Thank you, Dr. McGuire, for developing a strong doctoral program and for ensuring my successful progression throughout this journey.

Thank you to my dissertation committee, Sheryl Reinisch and Julie Owens, for serving as my play experts, advocates, and cheerleaders. I appreciated your honest feedback and continual guidance during this process to ensure the final product was one of integrity and worth.

I would also like to thank the doctoral program instructors who forged new ground with the green cohort and tolerated our frequent and often unsolicited advice and critique. To my fellow "greens" – Sarah, Lisa, Tina, Megan, Bobbi, Gina, Gloria, and Kathleen – thank you for being your powerful, creative, compassionate, innovative, and inspiring selves. You stretched my thinking and transformed me in ways I could not have imagined.

Finally, I am grateful to my family and friends, who always cheered me on even when this research meant sacrifices for the people I love most. Thank you, Jason, for being my person, selflessly and patiently giving me the time and space to complete this research.

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine visiting the neighborhood public school for kindergarten round-up as an incoming parent. Your 4-year-old looks nervous, wide-eyed and tightly gripping your hand as you enter the school. Bending down, you quietly tell her this will be her school soon.

Next year your daughter will enter kindergarten. She does not know what kindergarten is exactly, just that it comes after preschool and is a new place with a new teacher and a lot of new kids. In her preschool class, your daughter's favorite activities are watercolor painting, dressing up, playing house, and squishing playdough to make "cookies" with her friends. In this neighborhood school, there are two kindergarten classrooms you visit.

As you walk your timid little girl into the first classroom, the children are spread around the room in small groups and partners, seemingly engaged in a variety of activities. At one table, the children are building with Legos. At another, children are writing and drawing pictures in child-sized notebooks, at times stopping to share their story with a friend. On the carpet, a group of boys are constructing what looks like a castle with wooden blocks and colorful plastic teddy bears. In the opposite corner, two girls dressed up in doctor's scrubs with stethoscopes are applying bandages to a fuzzy purple kitten. One scribbles a note on what appears to be a doctor's prescription pad. The room feels warm and inviting and there is a busy hum of children's play surrounding you. The space appears intentionally planned to support the rich, playful activities throughout the room.

Much activity is taking place in this space and it takes a minute to locate the teacher, who is seated on the floor with two boys. The boys are playing a card game and appear to have different understandings of the rules. The teacher does not force her own solution to the conflict. She guides them with a suggestion and then stands and moves away to the writing table, where

she assists a few budding writers label pictures by sounding out words. Looking down at your daughter who has slowly released the hold on your leg, you see a faint smile begin to emerge. This space looks familiar, fun, and inviting. The children in the room are joyful, speak eagerly with their play peers, and are deeply engaged in their chosen activities. The teacher appears kind and supportive in her interactions with the children. You leave the room and walk across the hall to the second kindergarten classroom.

Entering the room, you notice most of the students are seated at desks with worksheets and pencils in hand. The students are quietly working. Two girls who start to chat at a table near you are shushed by the teacher with the reminder, "Finish your work or you do not go to recess." You glance down to see two worksheets: one to practice printing the letter *A* in uppercase and lowercase and the other on counting objects to 10. Some students have finished both pages and are getting up to turn in their work, announcing loudly, "I'm done. Now what do I do?" The teacher offers a page titled *A is for Alligator* for fast finishers to sit down at their seats and quietly color. Other students have yet to write their name on the papers. You look around and locate some Legos, wooden blocks, and watercolor sets on a shelf out of reach of the children. You make your way over to the teacher's desk, where she has been seated since you entered, and ask her about the materials. She says she offers "free choice" on Friday afternoon as motivation to get the children to do their work. Students who do not finish work do not get choice time. She mentions she does not have time to just let the children play because there is so much content they must learn now in kindergarten. Besides, when it is choice time, children just argue over the materials so it is usually more of a hassle than anything.

Glancing down at your daughter who has resumed her tight and apprehensive hold on your leg, her brow is furrowed. This room is not like anything she has seen in preschool, and it

does not look or sound fun. You lead her out of the room, reflecting on the two classrooms you visited and trying to decide which would be the best kindergarten classroom for your child. The first classroom you visited was playful and warm and inviting, but you wonder if the students in that classroom will be prepared for first grade if they spend much of their time just playing. It looks like your kindergarten classroom when you were a child, but you also know the expectations are much higher now. In contrast, the second classroom clearly prioritized work and practicing key academic skills. Which is the better fit for your kindergarten child? Should she be spending her day at play or engaged in academic work? Which type of classroom, or kindergarten teacher, is best for your daughter?

As this opening scenario indicates, many kindergarten classrooms have changed significantly in recent decades. An experience once defined by finger-painting, dress up, and recess has become increasingly academic and decreasingly playful (Miller & Almon, 2009; Strauss, 2013). Many kindergarten classrooms now look like those historically found in higher grades: students sitting at desks, listening to the teacher give instructions, and completing skill worksheets aligned to math and reading standards (Gullo & Hughes, 2011). The dress up area is gone, replaced by bookshelves filled with tubs of decodable books. Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, and Singer (2006) observe that in today's standards-based classrooms:

> There is little time for play … Indeed, play is viewed as a waste of time when more important "work," the work of memorizing and parroting, could be done. As the pressure on children in school increases, paradoxically their ability to relax and just have fun through play is being restricted. (p. 3)

As play is steadily decreasing to make way for structured learning, empirical research on the benefits of play continues to grow. Research by developmental psychologists, especially at the

early childhood level, supports the claim that "play is learning" and such play contributes to healthy cognitive and social-emotional development (Singer, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006). Even for some academic skills, evidence suggests that playful learning is more effective than direct instruction (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Newcombe, & Golinkoff, 2013; Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). Despite mounting evidence of the benefits of play and learning through play, there continues to be a gap between what research supports and classroom practice. Even when teachers claim to value play and are knowledgeable of the benefits of play, they may struggle to translate that belief into their teaching practice (Lynch, 2015). The primary reason often cited is increasing academic demands in kindergarten (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

The foundations of early childhood education support play as the most authentic and natural context for learning for young children. Early childhood philosophers Johann Amos Comenius, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau view the young child as acquiring knowledge through sensory experiences, being autonomous learners, and deserving opportunities for self-exploration (Bertram, 2012; Comenius, 1893; Uzgalis, 2015). These philosophers maintain the role of the teacher should be a facilitator of learning, rather than a director. This view of the child and suggested role of the teacher align with a child-centered, playful learning approach.

Developmental theorists and proponents of the constructivist approach, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky also endorse play as an authentic context for learning. Piaget and Vygotsky were primarily concerned with how child learn about the world, both observing that children's interactions with the environment construct, or create, new learning. These interactions often occur within the context of play. The Cognitive Development Theory of Piaget and the Social

Constructivist Theory of Vygotsky (Mooney, 2013) provide strong theoretical foundations supporting a playful learning pedagogy in kindergarten. Even though they viewed the role of play differently as it relates to cognitive development—Piaget as a natural context for intellectual development to be observed and Vygotsky as a natural context for intellectual development to be created or built through social interactions—both recognized the inherent value of play within the process of learning.

Kindergarten pedagogy lends further support for play and playful learning. The "father of kindergarten," Friedrich Froebel, created the concept of a garden of children in 1840 as a child-centered environment, recognizing play as the most natural method through which children develop the knowledge and skills to grow as human beings (1887, 1889). Froebel's model emphasized the critical role of a kind and knowledgeable adult to guide children's discovery and learning (Manning, 2005).

Adding to these foundational principles, a diverse body of empirical research on the benefits of play and a playful learning approach supports the assertion that play is learning in early childhood. Three longitudinal play intervention studies are frequently cited as prominent scholarly literature on the value and benefits of play: the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993), the Perry Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), and The Carolina Abecedarian Project (Campbell, et al., 2012). These well-known studies are frequently referenced as confirming evidence that playful learning approaches in early childhood have significant, positive, long-term effects. The Preschool Comparison Study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) suggested that the opposite may also be true: the use of highly structured academic learning marked by didactic methods in early childhood may have detrimental long-term effects on development and learning.

Promoting a playful learning approach in kindergarten, Miller and Almon (2009) assert, "Children in play-based kindergarten have a double advantage over those who are denied play: they end up equally as good or better at reading and other intellectual skills, and they are more likely to become well-adjusted healthy people" (p. 8). This statement highlights the growing body of evidence suggesting the benefits of playful learning for both cognitive and social-emotional domains. Empirical studies on free play and guided play, both key components of a playful learning approach, reveal several positive outcomes to play with correlations to academic and social-emotional learning goals.

Observational studies of free play reveal that play can develop foundational mathematical understandings (Ginsburg, Pappas, & Seo, 2001; Sarama & Clements, 2009) and promote language and literacy development (Cloran, 2005; Fein, 1981; Nicolopoulou, McDowell, & Brockmeyer, 2006; Pellegrini & Galda, 1990; Sachs, 1987). Correlational studies have shown literacy-related play predicts reading readiness (Bergen & Mauer, 2000) and talk during play improves vocabulary (Dickinson & Moreton, 1991). Free play also promotes the development of social competence and self-regulatory skills (Fabes, Eisenberg, Hanish, & Spinrad, 2001; Fantuzzo, Sekino, & Cohen, 2004; Hughes & Dunn, 1998).

Guided play interventions have been shown to improve academic development with gains lasting into the primary grades (Marcon, 1999, 2002; Stipek et al., 1998). In experimental studies, guided play has increased vocabulary scores (Han, Moore, Vukelich, & Buell, 2010) and helped children learn the properties of geometric shapes (Fisher et al., 2013). For social-emotional development, guided play interventions have been shown to improve emotional regulation and lower stress levels (Burts et al., 1992) as well as decrease problem behaviors (Marcon, 1992, 1994, 1999).

The foundations of early learning, longitudinal play studies, and empirical research on both free play and guided play lend support to the argument that young children learn through play. Kindergarten children need to play to learn. The research base is so strong that the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, has identified playful learning as best practice in early childhood (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The researcher maintains that within the kindergarten classroom, teachers should be supporting the ways in which children learn best. Therefore, teachers need to support play and learning through play. However, play in the kindergarten classroom continues to decline (Miller & Almon, 2009). The decrease in play is attributable to interrelated and complex policy factors, a pedagogy favoring direct instruction over playful learning, the perception of a work-play dichotomy, and pressure to teach academic skills.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and subsequent accountability mandates have caused kindergarten classrooms to replace developmentally appropriate, playful learning experiences with scripted curricula (Miller & Almon, 2009) explicitly linked to academic standards (National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) and mandated testing (Pellegrini, 2009; Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, & Orfield, 2004). It is not yet known if the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), which replaced NCLB, will have an impact on this situation. To meet increasing academic demands, kindergarten pedagogy has transformed from playful to didactic. Underlying these opposing pedagogies is a perception, even among some kindergarten teachers, that dichotomizes play and work. Work is equated with learning and play is equated with a break from learning, or simply frivolous. Kindergarten teachers are in a position where they believe they must choose to teach or let children play (National Education Association, 2006; Viadero, 2007). This perception of a play-work dichotomy may be perpetuated by

pressure from fellow teachers, administrators, and parents that kindergarten should prepare children for first grade by embracing these increasing academic expectations.

These challenges have reduced play in kindergarten classrooms. However, there are ways that teachers may still strive to support play in the classroom. The researcher is primarily interested in how kindergarten teachers in the public school classroom are supporting play – how they are making space for play, striving to put into practice their beliefs about the value of play and playful learning. Miller and Almon (2009) developed the Kindergarten Continuum (Figure 1) to show how play may present itself in various forms in the classroom. The continuum could be looked at as a play-work continuum, with lots of free play and little structure on one end and minimal play and high structure on the other end. The researcher is interested in how kindergarten teachers are supporting play, ideally in the middle of this continuum, through child-initiated play and learning through play.

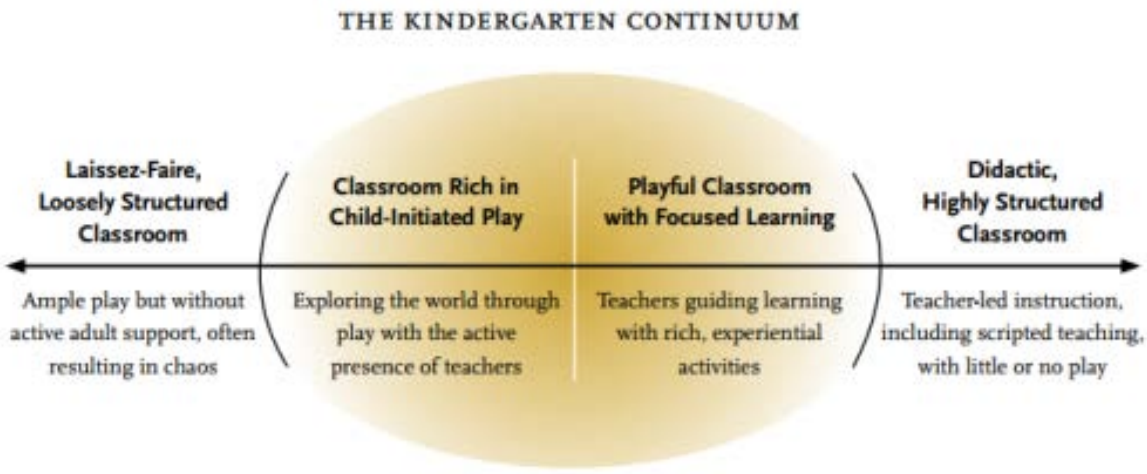


Figure 1. The Kindergarten Continuum. Miller & Almon (2009)

Due to the real-world context of the public school kindergarten classroom and a desire to understand the complexity surrounding support for play, the researcher selected the case study method, the ideal method when the line between the context and the phenomenon is not clear

(Yin, 2014). The case study method is also ideal when the criterion for sampling – in this case, public school kindergarten classrooms that support play – may result in a very small number from the larger population of all kindergarten classrooms in the district of the study. Within the case study method, a descriptive multi-case study approach was identified as the best fit to answer the research questions.

Statement of the Problem

This research sought to better understand how kindergarten teachers are striving to support play and learning through play in kindergarten classrooms, despite existing challenges. The research study addressed how play is supported in public school kindergarten classrooms by exploring the opportunities for play, types of play, teacher practices, the play environment, and teachers' perspectives on the value of play and its relation to playful learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the support for play in public school kindergarten classrooms, despite current challenges to playful learning. The researcher's interest was in understanding kindergarten teacher attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to play and learning through play. Specifically, the researcher was interested in how teaching philosophies and beliefs influence practice and the additional factors which influence teachers' abilities to integrate play in the classroom. Through this research, the researcher sought to better understand how teachers are supporting play in an increasingly demanding academic climate of kindergarten.

Research Questions

The primary research question explored in this study was, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" The research sub-questions which assisted in answering the primary research question were:

- How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?
- What opportunities for play are provided in kindergarten classrooms?
- How does the classroom environment provide for play?
- What types of play are present in kindergarten classrooms?
- How do kindergarten teachers support play and learning through play?

Significance of the Study

While existing research continues to identify both the benefits of playful learning as well as the challenges teachers face in implementing play in the classroom, suggesting a gap between theory and practice, few research studies have shed light on how teachers are maintaining play in the classroom while also meeting increasing academic demands (DeVries, 2001; Drucker, Franklin, & Schecter, 2007). This study sought to understand how some kindergarten teachers in public school classrooms are supporting play and learning through play with the increasing academic demands, balancing a personal belief in the value of play with the curricular demands of a standards-based system. The current research will add to the field of study as it relates to teacher perspectives on supporting play in the classroom. In addition, this research will add to scholarly research on how teachers are effectively supporting play despite increasing accountability pressures that may reduce the support for play.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have been defined and utilized by the researcher as follows:

- playful learning: a whole-child educational pedagogy providing opportunities for both free play and guided play (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, & Berk, 2010);
- didactic instruction: used synonymously with direct instruction and teacher-directed activities, it emphasizes acquisition of discrete facts and skills (Miller & Almon, 2009);
- free play: activities freely chosen and directed by children, arising from intrinsic motivation, with minimal adult intervention; also referenced as child-initiated play (Miller & Almon, 2009);
- guided play: activities incorporating adult-scaffolded learning but remaining child-directed (Weisberg et al., 2013);
- teacher perspective: the philosophy, views, beliefs, and attitudes about play and learning;
- opportunities for play: the duration, frequency, and locus of control of play experiences;
- play environment: the physical environment of the classroom and materials available to support play and learning;
- types of play: the broad categories of play in which children may engage during play scenarios, such as construction play, make-believe play, or sensory play (Miller & Almon, 2009); and
- role of the teacher: teacher practices before, during, and after play that support learning through play.

Limitations and Delimitations

The researcher identified the following limitations and delimitations of the research design. Limitations address external situations out of the control of the researcher, while delimitations address internal situations, or boundary choices, which the researcher intentionally set to reasonably restrict the extent of the study.

Limitations within this research study included the researcher as the primary research instrument, the self-reporting by participants of their perspectives and practices, and the possibility that the purposeful sampling undertaken to identify ideal cases did not in fact identify cases which best exemplified the variables of the study. Delimitations, or intentional boundary choices of the researcher, included: sampling of kindergarten teachers only, restricting the number of cases for in-depth study to three, and confining the study to one urban school district. The researcher set these boundary choices to make the research design reasonable within time constraints and available resources. In addition, the research setting was accessible since the researcher lived near the urban school district of the study. Limiting the number of cases to three was in keeping with multiple-case study research design recommendations, which suggests no more than four cases (Yin, 2014) to allow for in-depth analysis and the development of deeper understandings within each context and setting.

Acknowledging these research limitations and delimitations, the researcher was aware that bias may consciously and unconsciously affect the research process. As a kindergarten teacher, the researcher has professional experience with believing in play and yet struggling to put it into practice. The researcher endeavored to maintain objectivity in data collection and analysis, ensuring that the research was reported honestly. Through member checking and

awareness of researcher reflexivity, the researcher attempted to report the stories of the participants free of researcher bias.

Summary

In this study, the researcher identified five key attributes of support for play: teacher perspectives, opportunities for play, the play environment, types of play, and the role of the teacher. Despite current challenges that may limit play in public school kindergarten classrooms, the researcher wanted to explore and describe how teachers are succeeding in continuing to support meaningful, rich play.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature expands the conceptual framework components identified in this chapter. In Chapter 3, the methodology for this descriptive, multiple case study is outlined in detail. In Chapter 4, the research findings for each research sub-question are discussed. In Chapter 5, conclusions, discussion, and suggestions for future research are provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The kindergarten classroom has evidenced great shifts in recent decades. A cherished experience once marked by dress up, snack time, and extended periods of play has become increasingly academic and significantly less playful (Miller & Almon, 2009; Strauss, 2013). A once-sacred space and time in the schooling of our youngest learners has been dubbed "the new first grade" (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016) and now resembles the stereotypical elementary classroom in America: students seated at desks, listening to the teacher, and completing skill-based worksheets aligned to academic standards (Gullo & Hughes, 2011). In today's standards-based kindergarten classroom, there is little time or space for play.

Study Topic

This research seeks to explore how play is supported in the kindergarten classroom, despite increasing academic demands. The researcher is interested in the gap that exists between what is known to be best practice and what happens in many kindergarten classrooms. While play is decreasing to make way for structured learning (Miller & Almon, 2009), empirical research on the benefits of play and learning through play is abundant. At the early childhood level, research supports the claim that "play is learning" for our youngest students and such play is a critical component for healthy cognitive and social-emotional development (Singer et al., 2006). For some academic skills, evidence suggests that playful learning is more effective than direct instruction (Fisher et al., 2013; Weisberg et al., 2013). Even when teachers value play and are knowledgeable of the many benefits of play, many struggle to translate that belief into their teaching practice (Lynch, 2015). The primary challenge to play often indicated by teachers is the increasing academic demands in kindergarten (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Context

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and subsequent accountability mandates have led kindergarten classrooms to replace developmentally appropriate, playful learning experiences with scripted curricula (Miller & Almon, 2009) explicitly linked to academic standards (National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) and mandated testing (Pellegrini, 2009; Sunderman et al., 2004). It is yet to be determined if the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), which replaced NCLB, will have an impact on this situation. To meet increasing academic demands, kindergarten pedagogy has transformed from playful to didactic. Underlying these opposing pedagogies is a perception, even among some kindergarten teachers, dichotomizing play and work. In this view, work is equated with learning and play is equated with a break from real learning, or simply frivolous. Kindergarten teachers have been placed in a position where they believe they must choose to teach or let children play (National Education Association, 2006; Viadero, 2007). The perception of a play-work dichotomy is furthered by pressure from some fellow teachers, administrators, and parents that kindergarten teachers should better prepare children for first grade by embracing increasing academic expectations. In sum, the decrease in play is attributable to complex but interrelated policy factors, direct instruction pedagogy, the perception of a work-play dichotomy, and increasing pressure to teach academic skills in kindergarten.

Significance

Existing research continues to identify both the benefits of playful learning as well as the challenges teachers face in implementing play in the classroom, suggesting a gap between theory and practice. However, few research studies have shed light on how teachers are maintaining play in the classroom while also meeting the increasing academic demands (DeVries, 2001;

Drucker et al., 2007). This study seeks to understand how kindergarten teachers in public school classrooms are supporting play and learning through play, balancing a belief in the value of play with the curricular demands of a standards-based system. The current research will add to the field of study as it relates to teacher perspectives on supporting play in the classroom. In addition, it will add to scholarly research on how teachers are effectively supporting play despite increasing accountability pressures.

Problem Statement

This research seeks to better understand how kindergarten teachers are striving to support play and playful learning in kindergarten classrooms, despite the existing challenges tied to increasing academic demands. The research will address how play is supported in public school kindergarten classrooms by exploring the opportunities for play, the types of play, how teacher practices support play and learning through play, the play environment, and teachers' perspectives on the value of play and its relation to playful learning.

Organization

In this chapter, the literature is presented which builds an argument for child-initiated play and playful learning as best practice in the kindergarten classroom. First, the conceptual framework outlines the key components of the study topic, from the foundations of early childhood education to the current state of the problem, which favors direct instruction over play and learning through play. Next, a review of the research literature, including methodological literature that informed the conceptual framework, is presented. A synthesis of research findings section identifies the characteristics or supports for play which arose as commonalities from the literature, followed by a critique of previous research evidence, claims, and concepts as relevant to this study. A section on a review of methodological issues explores the methods and

methodologies in which the research topic has been investigated in the field. Finally, the chapter summary reviews the key points and claims developed by the researcher.

Literature Search Strategy

To build a foundational understanding of the central concept of play, the researcher began by collecting and analyzing research on play in the classroom, playful learning, and the benefits of play for children. Multiple resources were accessed and reviewed over a period of nearly ten months, including peer-reviewed journals, books, and research organizations such as The National Institute for Play, the Strong National Museum of Play, and the Alliance for Childhood. Topical reading on the benefits of play and how children learn through play led the researcher to primary source empirical studies linking play to academic, social-emotional, and physical development outcomes.

Online research employed the search engines available through Concordia University's library databases and public sources: ERIC, ProQuest Education Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, ProQuest Central, JSTOR, Sage Journals Online, and Google Scholar. Keyword and Boolean search word and phrases included: *kindergarten, best practices, play, benefits of play, emergent literacy, social-emotional development, academic development, child development theories, early childhood, teacher language, social skills, developmental needs, play-based learning, literacy, intentional teaching, developmentally appropriate practice, learning, NCLB, CCSS, philosophy of early childhood education, child development, guided play, playful learning, scaffolding, language development,* and *Reggio-Emilia.* After identifying seminal authors on the research topic, the reference lists of seminal work were used to identify further scholarly research relevant to the study.

Conceptual Framework

The foundations of early childhood education support play as the most authentic context for learning in young children. Early childhood philosophers Johann Amos Comenius, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau view learning in childhood as acquiring knowledge through self-exploration and the role of the teacher as a facilitator and nurturer of authentic, autonomous learning (Bertram, 2012; Comenius, 1893; Uzgalis, 2015). Developmental theorists and proponents of the constructivist approach to learning, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, also support play as an authentic context for learning. Piaget and Vygotsky were primarily concerned with how children learn about the world, observing that it is children's interactions with the environment, often within the context of play, that create new learning (Mooney, 2013). Kindergarten pedagogy lends further support for play and playful learning in kindergarten. The "father of kindergarten" Friedrich Froebel created the concept of a garden of children in 1840 as a child-centered environment, recognizing play as the most natural method through which a child develops the knowledge and skills to grow as a human being (1887, 1889). Froebel's model emphasized the critical role of a kind and knowledgeable adult to guide children's discovery and learning (Manning, 2005).

Adding to these foundational principles, a diverse body of empirical research on the benefits of a playful learning approach supports the argument that play is learning in early childhood. Prominent in scholarly literature on the value and benefits of play, three longitudinal play intervention studies are frequently cited: the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al.,1993), the Perry Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), and The Carolina Abecedarian Project (Campbell et al., 2012). These well-known studies are often referenced as evidence that playful learning approaches in early

childhood have significant, positive, long-term effects. The Preschool Comparison Study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) demonstrated that the opposite may also be true: the use of structured academic learning marked by didactic methods in early childhood may have detrimental long-term effects on development and learning.

Regarding the use of a playful learning approach in kindergarten, Miller and Almon (2009) state, "Children in play-based kindergarten have a double advantage over those who are denied play: they end up equally as good or better at reading and other intellectual skills, and they are more likely to become well-adjusted healthy people" (p. 8). This statement suggests the benefits of playful learning on both the cognitive and social-emotional domains. Empirical studies on free play and guided play, both central concepts in a playful learning approach, reveal several positive outcomes to play and correlations to academic and social-emotional learning (Burts et al., 1992; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Ginsburg et al., 2001; Han et al., 2010; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006). These empirical studies supporting play and playful learning are presented in greater detail in the next section, review of research literature and methodological literature.

The foundations of early learning, longitudinal play studies, and empirical research on free play and guided play lend support to the argument that young children learn through play. In the case of this research, kindergarten children need to play to learn. In fact, play has been identified by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, as best practice in early childhood (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The researcher maintains that in the kindergarten classroom, teachers should be supporting the ways in which children learn best. Therefore, teachers need to support play and learning through play. However, play in the kindergarten classroom continues to decline (Miller & Almon, 2009; Strauss, 2013).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and subsequent accountability mandates have led kindergarten classrooms to replace developmentally appropriate, playful learning experiences with scripted curricula (Miller & Almon, 2009) explicitly linked to academic standards (National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) and mandated testing (Pellegrini, 2009; Sunderman et al., 2004). To meet these increasing demands, kindergarten pedagogy has transformed from playful to didactic. Underlying these opposing pedagogies is a perception dichotomizing play and work: work is equated with learning and play is equated with a break from real learning. This is furthered by pressure from some fellow teachers, administrators, and parents that kindergarten teachers should embrace increasing academic expectations to better prepare children for first grade.

These challenges to playful learning have reduced play in kindergarten classrooms. However, there are ways that teachers may still strive to support play in the classroom. Miller and Almon (2009) developed the Kindergarten Continuum (Figure 2) to show how play may present itself in various forms in the classroom. The continuum could also be considered the play-work continuum, with a lot of free play and little structure on one end and minimal play and high structure on the other end. The researcher is interested in how kindergarten teachers are supporting play, ideally in the middle of this continuum, through child-initiated play and learning through play.

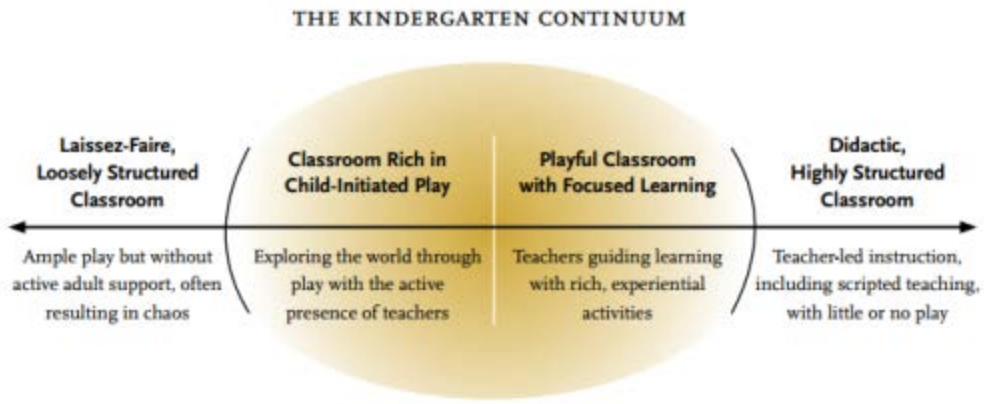


Figure 2. The Kindergarten Continuum. Miller & Almon (2009)

Review of Research Literature

In this section, a review of the research literature will further extrapolate the components of the conceptual framework identified in the previous section, providing the evidence-base grounding this research within the field of study. This section synthesizes the methodological approaches used in prior research in the field.

Early childhood foundations. Early childhood education is grounded in a philosophical tradition that honors the child as innately curious, free, and good; recognizes that the sensitive educator plays a crucial role by considering the developmental needs of each child; and seeks to create an environment which allows for learning to occur naturally. Such learning frequently occurs through play and playful experiences in early childhood. For young learners, play *is* learning, not separate from or dichotomously opposed as is a common belief (Singer et al., 2006). Despite the decreasing time and space for play to accommodate increasing academic demands for our youngest learners (Miller & Almon, 2009), kindergarten children need to play to learn.

Early childhood education philosophy. Early childhood philosophy is grounded in play as an authentic context for learning. Early childhood philosopher Johann Amos Comenius, who

viewed the child as naturally curious, believed the acquisition of knowledge must start with the sensory experience of the child and be driven by the interests and explorations of the learner (Comenius, 1893; Terzian, n.d.). Philosopher John Locke, who viewed the child as a naturally free and rational being, believed children will develop as autonomous, free-thinking learners in a positive, nurturing environment (Uzgalis, 2015). Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who viewed the child as innately good, believed young children gain knowledge through self-exploration in the physical world (Bertram, 2012). These philosophers all recognized the child as an autonomous learner, suggesting a child-centered approach which fosters autonomy as ideal in early learning environments.

The role of the educator presented by these philosophers is a facilitator, rather than a director, of learning. This suggests a child-centered, playful approach as opposed to a didactic instructional approach. Comenius emphasized the role of the teacher to provide individualized, differentiated instruction and making learning enjoyable (Terzian, n.d.); Locke highlighted the positive nurturing quality of a sensitive educator (Uzgalis, 2015); and Rousseau stressed fostering autonomy by intentionally manipulating the learning environment (Bertram, 2012). Taken together, these early childhood philosophies lay the foundation to support playful learning in kindergarten: playful learning is child-centered, scaffolded by a knowledgeable teacher who creates a sensitive learning environment, and arises out of a child's natural curiosity.

Child development theories. The cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget and the social constructivist theory of Lev Vygotsky provide a theoretical foundation for playful learning in kindergarten. Piaget and Vygotsky, primarily concerned with *how* children learn about the world, both observed that it was children's interactions with their environment which create new learning. While both advocate a constructivist philosophy, seeing the child as an active learner

acquiring knowledge through sensory, real world experiences (Brooks & Brooks, 2001), their theories of how knowledge is constructed are quite different. While Piaget saw learning as primarily a cognitive and independent task which engaged the intellect of the learner, Vygotsky saw learning as a social endeavor between learner and environment, including peers and teachers (Mooney, 2013). Piaget and Vygotsky explain the relationship between play and cognitive development through different lenses, with the Piagetian perspective evidenced readily in free play and the Vygotskian perspective evidenced more readily in guided play.

Jean Piaget. Piaget's theory of cognitive development included three primary components: schema, the basic building blocks of intelligence or knowledge; adaptation processes, allowing the transition from one stage of development to the next; and discrete stages of development that follow a predictable path but vary in rate from child to child (McLeod, 2015). Piaget (1973) believed intellectual growth was influenced by the child's interactions with the environment. As the children interact with the environment, their schema, or units of knowledge, would grow. Seeking equilibrium, children either assimilate new knowledge into existing schema or accommodate by creating new or more complex schema.

Piaget equated play to assimilation, when the child makes environmental stimuli match existing concepts, and equated work to accommodation when the child must create or develop new concepts (Piaget, 1962; Wadsworth, 2004). With this distinction, Piaget claimed that play does not, by itself, create new learning. To Piaget, play allows children to practice what they have already learned but does not teach anything new. In other words, play may reveal or reflect the emerging knowledge of the child but does not contribute to it.

Piaget's preoperational stage of cognitive development, roughly ages 2 to 7, is the stage of kindergarten children. At this stage, children form ideas from their perceptions acquired

through direct experiences, focus on only one variable at a time, and tend to overgeneralize based on limited experiences. Children at this developmental level need a teacher who will ask probing questions and push them to construct their own knowledge rather than simply being told the right answer (Mooney, 2013). As such, the role of the teacher is to nurture inquiry but allow for children to come to learning through self-exploration. For Piaget, the learning acquired through such self-directed activities may be revealed in a child's free play.

Lev Vygotsky. Lev Vygotsky shared many of Piaget's assumptions about how children learn. However, he placed more emphasis on the social context of learning. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (1978) stressed the fundamental role of social interaction on cognitive development, with a child's community playing a central role in the process of making meaning. While Piaget suggested children's development precedes learning, Vygotsky argued that social learning precedes development. In other words, the development of higher mental processes originates in social processes.

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory embodies two main principles: the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Somewhat self-explanatory, the more knowledgeable other is a teacher, adult, or peer who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner (McLeod, 2014). The key is that the more knowledgeable other possesses some knowledge or skill about the topic to impart or share with the learner. Integrally related, the zone of proximal development, or ZPD, is defined as "the distance between the most difficult task a child can do alone and the most difficult task a child can do with help" (Mooney, 2013, p. 101). Also referred to as the edge of learning, Vygotsky's ZPD is where learning happens—the space between what a child knows or can do independently

and what a child can come to know or do with the help of a more experienced, knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky maintained that observing children at play was a valid source of data in understanding how children learn, and theorized that the social interactions supported language development, with learning advanced through scaffolding in such interactions (Mooney, 2013). In contrast to Piaget, who saw play as revealing a child's cognitive development, Vygotsky believed play facilitates the child's developing cognition. In other words, children are not just practicing what they know during play: they are learning new things. This type of learning, learning which occurs in social contexts from more knowledgeable others, is embodied in the concept of guided play.

Theories of play. While the cognitive development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky have often been contrasted to highlight their key differences—Piaget and individual construction of knowledge versus Vygotsky and social learning—the core ideas of these two childhood development theories, when taken together, form a compelling argument for playful learning. While Piaget saw play as a natural context for intellectual development to be observed or displayed, Vygotsky saw play as a context for developing social and cognitive skills in tandem, with social interactions pushing a child to new learning. Even though they viewed the value of play differently, as it relates to cognitive development, they both valued play as a tool in the learning process.

Kindergarten pedagogy. The father of kindergarten, Friedrich Froebel, provides further support for the use of playful learning in early childhood. He created "the garden of children" in 1840 as a unique time and space for children to grow and develop naturally (Flanagan, 2005). In this child-centered environment, utilizing intentional methods and materials, Froebel's

kindergarten model developed children through creativity, self-directed activity, motor skill development, and social engagement (Froebel, 1887; 1889). Froebel recognized play as the most natural method through which a child develops the knowledge and skills to grow as a human being.

As a significant influence on the American system of early childhood education, Froebel's kindergarten emphasized children's uniqueness in learning styles, learning through play, constructing meaning through manipulating objects, and caring and knowledgeable adult guidance as an aid to children's discovery and learning (Manning, 2005). Going back to the roots of kindergarten highlights the importance of play for learning and the critical role of the teacher from a historical perspective.

Summary. The philosophy of Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau, the childhood learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, and the kindergarten model of Froebel provide a strong foundation for the use of playful learning as an instructional approach in kindergarten. Building on this historical foundation, modern studies of play provide empirical evidence for both the short- and long-term benefits of play, support the argument that play is learning for young children, and provide a strong rationale for the use of playful learning in kindergarten.

Research on developmentally appropriate practice. Playful learning is a critical component within the early childhood framework for best practice developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC. The framework, termed "developmentally appropriate practice," outlines practices for promoting optimal learning and development of young children (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp, 1991; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Developmentally appropriate practice, "grounded both in the research on child development and learning and in the knowledge base regarding educational effectiveness,"

(Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 1) was formally defined when push-down academics in kindergarten became a major barrier to its use and early childhood researchers and professionals were forced to defend and define this child-centered approach (NAEYC, 1986).

An extensive research base on the link between play and foundational learning capacities, including memory, self-regulation, oral language, social skills, and school readiness (Bronson, 2000; Clawson, 2002; Davidson, 1998; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro, 2007; Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Elias & Berk, 2002; Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Lindsey & Colwell, 2003; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004) provides empirical evidence to support the NAEYC position that play is integral to developmentally appropriate practice. In fact, the NAEYC asserted, "Rather than detracting from academic learning, play appears to support the abilities that underlie such learning and thus to promote school success" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 15). The overwhelming research base led the NAEYC to conclude that play is the primary and ideal vehicle to develop self-regulation and promote language, cognitive, and social skills in the youngest of learners.

Longitudinal play studies. Longitudinal play intervention studies have shown that developmentally appropriate practice, marked by playful learning, has positive lifelong effects. The opposite is also true: a lack of developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood, specifically the removal of playful learning replaced by structured academic learning, has detrimental long-term effects. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart et al., 2005), the Perry Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), and the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Campbell, et al, 2012) are three longitudinal play studies which suggest significant benefits in the short- and long-term

to children who participate in developmentally appropriate learning environments marked by playful learning.

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project randomly assigned 3- and 4-year-old children born into poverty into one of two groups: either the experimental group that received the High/Scope curriculum, based on principles of active learning and positive adult-child interactions; or a control group, which received no preschool program. The High/Scope curriculum group evidenced short-term, near significant differences in achievement test scores and long-term, significant benefits such as higher earnings, improved job security, lower crime rates, and higher rates of high school graduation (Schweinhart et al., 2005). This landmark study established the value of a high-quality preschool program embracing developmentally appropriate practice and as such, defined by a playful learning approach.

The Perry Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), conducted by the same research group to evaluate the effectiveness of the High/Scope curriculum, utilized a similar experimental design and random assignment of 3- and 4-year-olds born into poverty into one of three preschool curriculum models: the High/Scope curriculum, a traditional Nursery School curriculum, and a Direct Instruction curriculum. The High/Scope and Nursery School curriculums emphasized child-initiated activity with teacher support, aligned to principles of developmentally appropriate practice, while the Direct Instruction curriculum utilized a teacher-directed, academic focus including drilling children on skills explicitly taught. While short-term results showed all three groups improved on intellectual performance based on tests of IQ with no significant differences between the three groups, long-term outcomes showed fewer felony arrests, fewer years of special education for emotional impairment, and higher

levels of schooling attained by those in the playful, more developmentally appropriate curriculum models (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

The long-term results of the Preschool Comparison study support the value of playful learning over direct instruction in early childhood. Such outcomes suggest that children learning in child-initiated, developmentally-appropriate early learning environments using a playful curriculum model exceed those in direct instruction on both social skills and cognitive skills, evidencing clear long-term gains for children in high-quality early childhood environments which value playful learning. These results suggest that the benefits, or functions, of play and playful learning are not always immediate. Unfortunately, current test-driven, standards-based education system seeks immediate results and has inadvertently created an environment which is not aligned to best practices of early learning.

The Carolina Abecedarian Project, which also used an experimental design, randomly assigned high-poverty, at-risk children at birth to either an early education intervention group or a control group which received no intervention. The intervention group received a play-based educational program built upon a Vygotskian approach, focusing on the holistic development of the child with a special emphasis on language development nurtured through playful caregiver exchanges. These playful exchanges often involved word play or hand games, allowing for a positive interaction with a playful tone between the child and adult, or more knowledgeable other. Outcomes showed significantly enhanced cognitive development during treatment years up to age five (Ramey & Campbell, 1984) and positive impacts on cognitive and academic skills through primary grades (Ramey & Campbell, 1991). Follow-up studies tracking the participants into adulthood revealed lifelong benefits for the intervention group, including higher intellectual test performance, higher scores on academic tests of reading and math, greater number of years

of college completed, better health, and higher job security (Campbell, et al., 2012; Campbell, Pungello, Miller Johnson, Burchinal, & Ramey, 2001; Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller Johnson, 2002).

These longitudinal studies lend support to the appropriateness and effectiveness of playful learning in early childhood. First, they provide empirical evidence of both short- and long-term benefits of playful learning. The research controlled for variables so that all the children participating in the program were equal, to show that the playful learning environment is the variable which accounts for the difference. While the goal of the High/Scope and Abecedarian studies may have been to show the effectiveness of their respective curriculums, it is of interest to note that both groups of children in playful learning environments—those in the High/Scope group with an explicitly defined curriculum framework, as well as those in the Nursery School group which was less rigid or explicit but also based on a traditional, playful approach, evidenced the long-term gains. This suggests that it is a playful approach embodying developmentally appropriate practice, not only limited to the High/Scope curriculum, which made the difference. Second, the results suggest that playful learning is a more appropriate approach than direct instruction in early childhood. Although conducted in preschool programs, the NAEYC framework for developmentally appropriate practice defines early childhood as birth to age 8, so playful learning in kindergarten should be considered equally beneficial to children's overall development as a playful learning environment in preschool.

Children enter kindergarten from a diverse range of preschool environments, from playful preschools such as Montessori or Reggio, to academic-based programs which believe in the power of play like Head Start, to home-based daycare programs, and even no preschool at all. All kindergarteners deserve equal access to a playful learning environment so that those who

have benefited from such in preschool continue to grow and those who have not had playful learning experiences can be nurtured and benefit from play as well. If all children are to both enjoy the experience of playful learning in kindergarten as well as continue to benefit from the experience in the long-term, playful learning in kindergarten is truly best practice.

Research on playful learning. The playful learning approach recognizes that learning occurs through play for young children. While a dichotomy may exist in the adult mind separating learning and play, "to the child, the two activities are one and the same" (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009, p. x). While the term "playful learning" has at times been used synonymously in literature with the term "guided play" (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009, p. 27), here the term playful learning is used to describe a whole-child educational pedagogy providing opportunities for both free play and guided play experiences (Fisher et al., 2010, p. 343). Miller and Almon (2009) state, "Children in play-based kindergarten have a double advantage over those who are denied play: they end up equally as good or better at reading and other intellectual skills, and they are more likely to become well-adjusted healthy people" (p. 8). This statement is supported by empirical evidence on the power of play for both academic and social-emotional development, including the longitudinal play intervention studies of the High/Scope curriculum and the Abecedarian Project previously discussed.

Free play. In free play, children acquire information and practice skills by engaging in self-directed and thus motivating activities (Elkind, 2007). Miller and Almon (2009) identify 12 key types of play, stating, "There are different types of play, but they often overlap in rich play scenarios. The well-developed player has a repertoire with many forms of play; the playful kindergarten supports them all" (p. 53). Nine of the twelve play types are relevant to the classroom: small-motor play (utilizing small toys and manipulatives); mastery play (repeating an

action over and over); rules-based play (making up own rules and social negotiation); construction play (building houses, ships, forts, and other structures); make-believe play (saying "Let's pretend" and following a narrative); symbolic play (converting an object into a toy or prop); language play (playing with words, rhymes, verses, and songs); playing with the arts (drawing, modeling, creating music, performing puppet shows); and sensory play (playing with dirt, sand, mud, water, and textured materials). The other three types of play identified by Miller and Almon (2009) include large-motor play, rough and tumble play, and risk-taking play, more likely to occur at recess, in an outdoor space, or during physical education rather than in the classroom.

These different types of play are characteristic of, and give relevance to, the argument that children create learning experiences through different kinds of play. Through self-directed play, children both learn new things as well as demonstrate their learning through repetitive practice. They do this independent of adult intervention or direction. Child-initiated, child-directed free-play—a concept which has been difficult to define due to the many forms it takes and the various functions it fulfills—embodies certain qualities that most researchers agree are present in its true form: play is generally fun, voluntary, flexible, actively engaging, lacks extrinsic goals, and possesses some element of make believe (Brown, 2009; Pellegrini, 2009; Sutton-Smith, 2001).

Academic development through free play. Free play has an extensive research base suggesting that the role of play is important in fostering mathematical understanding, developing language and literacy skills, and promoting positive social-emotional skill development. Observational studies reveal that a free play environment allows preschool-age children to practice and expound foundational mathematical understandings (Ginsburg et al., 2001; Sarama

& Clements, 2009). Evidence also suggests free play activities promote language and literacy development. For example, observational studies have examined speech discourse (Cloran, 2005; Fein, 1981; Sachs, 1987) which revealed the use of directives, requests, and commands in children's pretend play. In dramatic play, enacted narratives naturally require discourse between play partners (Nicolopoulou et al., 2006; Pellegrini & Galda, 1990). Correlational research on literacy behaviors and school readiness found a higher-rate of literacy-related play at the age of four predicted language and reading readiness in kindergarten (Bergen & Mauer, 2000) and the amount of time spent talking with peers by 3-year-olds positively correlated to the size of vocabulary upon entering kindergarten (Dickinson & Moreton, 1991).

Social-emotional development through free play. Free play also promotes the development of social competence and self-regulatory skills; both skill sets are critical for functioning in the learning environment and for later success in life: "Through play, children recreate roles and situations that reflect their sociocultural world, where they learn how to subordinate desires to social rules, cooperate with others willingly, and engage in socially appropriate behavior" (Fisher et al., 2010, p. 349). Pretend play, a form of free play, allows for theory-of-mind development when young children discuss feelings and take another person's perspective such as realizing that their own desires and intentions are different than another child's desires. These building blocks of social competence are positively linked to healthy peer relations (Fabes et al., 2001; Hughes & Dunn, 1998).

Pretend play also contributes to emotional regulation, as studies have found conflict resolution themes in play narratives positively correlated to effective emotional self-regulation of preschoolers (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). Several studies examining the development of prosocial behaviors in early childhood reveal that toddlers and preschoolers displaying prosocial behaviors

in play interactions are more likely to make new friends, gain peer acceptance, and form trusting relationships with teachers (Ladd & Birch, 1997; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Colemen, 1997), indicators predicative of later academic achievement. In addition to the many benefits of free play supported by research, there are additional benefits to the use of guided play for both academic and social-emotional development as well. The next section addresses guided play and its support in the research literature.

Guided play. Guided play is directed by the child but scaffolded by a well-intentioned teacher who "arranges materials and activities in the room to foster child-initiated discovery and watches for opportunities to interact with children during naturally occurring 'teachable moments,' when the child is poised to learn new concepts" (Gordon, 2012, p. 84). In guided play, the role of the teacher is as a facilitator or co-creator of learning. Guided play has increased in the early childhood research literature in recent years, predominantly as a way to incorporate play while achieving curricular goals. With the increasing demands created by educational policy and the push-down of rigorous academics in kindergarten, early childhood researchers and teachers desiring to protect childhood but still attempting to meet increasing academic demands have explored guided play to meet curriculum demands with a child-centered pedagogy.

Proponents argue that rather than being forced to decide between academic learning or letting children play, the use of guided play allows for both to happen successfully in the early childhood classroom (Fisher et al., 2010; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Weisberg et al., 2013; Weisberg, Kittredge, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, & Klahr, 2015). While the child maintains autonomy as a decision-maker and directs his or her own learning, the role of the adult is

creating the intentional environment and gently scaffolding learning through asking questions, making observations, or suggesting alternative options.

Academic development through guided play. Child-centered, guided play approaches have been shown to improve academic development with gains lasting into the primary grades (Marcon, 1999, 2002; Stipek et al., 1998). Intervention studies evidence how guided play can be utilized with young children to target specific academic learning outcomes.

In one study of preschool children, a guided play intervention was shown to increase vocabulary scores for children identified as at-risk (Han et al., 2010). In the study, two groups of children engaged in an interactive book reading activity designed to teach new vocabulary. Twice a week for two months, children engaged in a 30-minute session of interactive book reading. In one group, the entire 30 minutes utilized the instructional teaching protocol, essentially a teacher-directed activity. In the second group, the instructional teaching protocol lasted 20 minutes and was followed by 10 minutes of guided play with the new vocabulary words. While post-test results indicated that both groups made gains in expressive language, the group engaged in guided play made significantly greater gains compared to the group that did not play. These results imply that having less time spent engaged in instruction and more time spent in guided play to interact and engage with the vocabulary has a positive overall academic impact.

Another guided play intervention study examined how 4- and 5-year-old children learned properties of four geometric shapes (Fisher et al., 2013). Seventy children were assigned to one of three pedagogical conditions: guided play, didactic instruction, and free play. In both the guided play and didactic instruction conditions, children were taught definitional properties of each shape in a playful, exploratory manner and were shown examples of the four shapes. In the

guided play condition, the experimenter invited the children to help her figure out the shapes' secrets—what makes them "real" shapes—through discovery, questioning, and encouraging the child to touch or trace shape cards. Then wax construction sticks were brought out for the children to "build" each of the shapes by looking at the shape cards. In the didactic instruction condition, the experimenter acted as the shape explorer while the children sat passively by, watching and listening. In the free play condition, the same shape cards were provided to children, stacked by their respective shapes (i.e., all triangles together) to enhance children's ability for comparison naturally while comparing cards. After playing with the shape cards, children were provided the construction sticks. In all three conditions, children were exposed to shape stimuli for approximately the same amount of time. Immediately following the experimental condition, each child completed the same shape sorting task. These short-term results indicated that children taught shapes in the guided play condition had improved shape knowledge compared to those in the other two conditions. Such findings suggest that the scaffolding within guided play may increase engagement and facilitate meaning-making, thus enhancing learning of academic content.

Additional play intervention studies have shown similar academic learning benefits of guided play for preschool and kindergarten students (Bellin & Singer, 2006; Christie & Enz, 1992; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Pellegrini & Galda, 1990; Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2009). These play intervention studies lend support for student-directed, teacher-facilitated learning—the use of a playful teaching pedagogy—to positively impact academic outcomes in the early childhood classroom.

Social-emotional development through guided play. For social-emotional development, guided play interventions have been shown to improve emotional regulation and lower stress

levels (Burts et al., 1992), as well as decrease problem behaviors (Marcon, 1992, 1994, 1999). Guided play pedagogies have also been shown to increase motivation (Hirsh-Pasek, 1991; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995) and improve executive functioning skills (Diamond et al., 2007).

In one guided play intervention study, preschool children in a Head Start program were randomly assigned to either a supported play intervention environment or a direct training intervention environment (Ogan & Berk, 2009). Children assigned to the supported play intervention showed improved self-regulation skills, planning skills, and behavior (suppressing, initiating, and controlling behavior in a task). An additional benefit observed for the children in the supported play intervention group is that during periods of free play, the children were more engaged in make believe play and spent less time unoccupied when compared to the children who were assigned to the directed training. This study suggests that guided play interventions in early childhood are beneficial for social-emotional development in the short term as well as academic achievement in the long-term.

The differences between the play intervention group and the direct training group are of particular interest given that performance on tests of self-regulation at three to five years of age are a strong predictor of academic achievement in reading and math through high school (Blair & Razza, 2007; Duncan et al., 2007; Gathercole, Tiffany, Briscoe, & Thorn, 2005). Additional research suggests that the use of direct instruction may limit exploration and self-initiated learning when children confront a novel problem (Bonawitz et al., 2011).

Challenges to playful learning. The paradox of play in kindergarten is that as research has built showing its wide-reaching benefits in all developmental areas, the actual incorporation of play in kindergarten curriculum and instruction has continued to decrease (Lynch, 2015;

Miller & Almon, 2009). In fact, most experimental and observational research on play and learning in early childhood is conducted in the preschool years because of its declining prevalence in public school kindergartens as they have become increasingly more academic and less playful.

Schools have reduced or eliminated recess time ("No Time for Play," 2001; Pellegrini, 2005) to provide more minutes of in-class instruction with the goal of improving academic performance. Music, art, and PE have been dropped in elementary schools to allow more time for the core subjects of reading and math (April & Gault, 2006; Spohn, 2008). Kronholz (2005) explained:

> President Bush's No Child Left Behind program pushed districts to require more from younger pupils. As a result, in many districts, skills once though appropriate for first or second graders are being taught in kindergarten, while kindergarten skills have been bumped down to preschool. (p. B1)

While the existence of rigorous learning expectations is a noble goal, the Common Core Standards have been criticized for not being developmentally appropriate (Alliance for Childhood, 2015) and for having the unintended consequence of causing teachers to adopt didactic instructional approaches in an attempt to cover the required content (Bowdon, 2015). The accompanying, mandated instructional minutes in math and reading are limiting or eliminating time for play as teachers and schools strive to meet these increasing demands.

Policy. The transformation of kindergarten from playful to academic has been accompanied in recent years by research documenting this new reality: *Einstein Never Used Flashcards* (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003), *Crisis in the Kindergarten* (Miller & Almon, 2009), *The Common Core's First Casualty: Playful Learning* (Bowdon, 2015), and *More Play*

Please (Lynch, 2015) are among the body of research that address some of the challenges. The primary issues identified in these studies are not educational, but rather social and political: national educational reform (NCLB, 2001) and accompanying accountability mandates have led kindergarten classrooms to replace developmentally-appropriate playful learning experiences with scripted curricula (Miller & Almon, 2009) explicitly linked to standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) and mandated testing (Pellegrini, 2009; Sunderman et al., 2004).

Pedagogy. While the Common Core dictates what to teach but not how to teach, the unintended consequence of "accountability shovedown" (Hatch, 2002) into kindergarten has been the adoption of didactic methods of instruction. Prioritizing what students learn through academic standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) has displaced the critical importance of how students learn. In preparing students to pass standardized tests in third grade, more rigorous standards have provided a checklist of skills and knowledge to be mastered in kindergarten (Almon & Miller, 2011). With the pressure to cover material, including mandated numbers of instructional minutes in math and literacy (Lynch, 2015), the use of scripted curricula and rote instructional methods have become the norm in many classrooms.

While teaching practices are often influenced by the pressure of other teachers, administrators, and parents, kindergarten teachers may also possess varying beliefs and interpretations of what is developmentally appropriate. DeVries (2001) investigated kindergarten classrooms where teachers reported to be using a "play-oriented curriculum" and found vast differences in how teachers interpreted developmentally appropriate play in their classroom practice. DeVries (2001) characterized classroom practices into four primary

interpretations of the play-oriented curriculum. Each of the four interpretations evidenced a unique relationship between play and work in classroom practice. The four views of play and its relationship to work within early childhood described by DeVries (2001) are: play is peripheral to learning and academic work; play is disguised academic work; play is integrated with social and emotional developmental goals; and play and work are integrated with social, emotional, moral, and intellectual developmental goals. While all four interpretations incorporate play in the classroom, DeVries (2001) argues that it is only the last interpretation, in which play and work are integrated with holistic developmental goals, which represents the ideal constructivist, developmentally appropriate teaching practice needed in kindergarten classrooms.

Miller and Almon (2009) characterize kindergarten teaching practices as falling on a continuum as well. At one extreme is the laissez-faire, loosely structured classroom in which there is free play with little adult support, resulting in a chaotic environment. At the other extreme is the didactic, highly structured classroom in which there is little room for play and predominantly teacher-led instruction. In the middle, between no structure and tight structure, Miller and Almon (2009) describe two classroom types: the classroom rich in child-initiated play, in which children explore the world with the active presence of teachers, and the playful classroom with focused learning, in which the teacher guides learning through experiential activities. The authors suggest that it is these two middle-ground classroom types—rich in child-initiated play (or free play) and with focused, playful learning (or guided play)—which kindergarten teachers should strive to create in their own classroom environments. Child-initiated play and focused, playful learning are aligned with the intended developmentally appropriate play suggested by the NAEYC guidelines (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The four interpretations of DeVries (2001) and the kindergarten classroom continuum of Miller and Almon (2009) suggest that even when teachers report to value play and make an effort to incorporate play with learning, not all kindergarten teachers have an accurate interpretation of how play and work should manifest themselves in an ideal, developmentally appropriate teaching practice. As such, teachers' own practices—even when they are striving toward developmentally appropriate play—may differ significantly and not stay true to the intent of developmentally appropriate practice.

Perception. Underlying opposing teaching pedagogies is a perception, even among some kindergarten teachers, dichotomizing play and work. In this view, work is equated with learning and play is equated with a break from real learning, or simply frivolous. Kindergarten teachers have been placed in a position where they believe they must choose to teach or let children play (National Education Association, 2006; Viadero, 2007). Gordon (2012) suggests that procedural, teacher-directed instruction is more familiar to policymakers and anxious parents who do not easily recognize learning within a playful environment. Ironically, in striving to raise the bar on learning in public schools, political accountability policies have, according to the research, done just the opposite: created stressful kindergarten environments that are not serving children well. Miller and Almon (2009) call the transformation of kindergarten "a national disgrace … kindergarten has ceased to be a garden of delight and has become a place of stress and distress" (p. 15). This place of stress and distress has been exacerbated by the dichotomous view of work and play.

Pressure. Within schools, kindergarten teachers may experience pressure from other teachers, administrators, and parents to reduce or eliminate play to make space for more recognizable modes of learning. Kindergarten teachers reportedly experience demands from the

first grade teachers within their own buildings (Goldstein, 2007) to quit playing and start learning. In addition, administrators not trained or experienced in early childhood best practice (Bowdon, 2015; Lynch, 2015) also pose a threat to playful learning in kindergarten. This pressure to eliminate play and create space for what is perceived to be real learning extends to the parents as well. Whether rooted in a desire for early achievement (Almon & Miller, 2011), the expectation for school to resemble work and not play (Goldstein, 2007) or the belief that play in kindergarten will not help their child achieve better grades later in school (Gordon, 2012), many parents are also not as knowledgeable about how kindergarten children learn best (Bowdon, 2015) and view play as frivolous or dichotomous from real learning, or work.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Less teacher-directed instruction and more student-directed, teacher-supported learning—the use of a playful teaching pedagogy—can positively impact academic and social-emotional learning outcomes in the classroom. In the literature, several distinct yet interrelated attributes or indicators are identified which support play and learning through play. These include the constructivist theory of learning and the whole child perspective, both elements reflected in a teacher's beliefs about play; the existence of child-initiated play and intentional learning through play, key concepts embodied through the provision of various types of play; teacher practices before, during, and after play to support playful learning; and a nurturing physical environment.

Constructivist theory of learning. The playful learning approach is grounded in the constructivist theory, viewing the child as an active learner acquiring knowledge through meaningful, real world, sensory environments. The constructivist theory maintains that learning occurs through interactions with the environment and more knowledgeable peers (Brooks & Brooks, 2001). Through interactions with the world, the active learner interacts with the world,

constructs knowledge, and continually evolves and adapts based on new experiences (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Teachers who support play and learning through play believe children learn through active construction of knowledge in their environment and provide learning opportunities reflecting this core belief.

Whole child perspective. A constructivist approach such as playful learning takes a whole-child perspective (Ray & Smith, 2010; Slade & Griffith, 2013; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). The whole-child perspective focuses attention on the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of learners. In addition to recognizing and developing students' knowledge and skills in these areas, the whole-child perspective recognizes learning not as compartmentalized but inexplicably intertwined: the cognitive, social, and physical domains are interrelated (Copple, Sigel, & Saunders, 1989; Froebel, 1897; Piaget, 1970). Developmentally appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) promotes a whole-child approach in early childhood education, acknowledging that play and playful learning develop not only the cognitive child but the social, emotional, and physical child as well.

Opportunities for child-initiated play. In a playful learning approach, time is provided for child-initiated play. Children engage in free play, which some term "active learning" (HighScope Preschool Curriculum, 2015), by constructing knowledge through interactions with materials, people, events, and ideas. Ample time for free play allows for the self-exploration of autonomous learners as it is child-directed with minimal adult interference. Free play is internally motivating and low stress for the players involved. Pretend play, construction play, and sensory play are examples of child-initiated, child-directed free play (Miller & Almon, 2009). Observations of students engaged in play provides inspiration for teachable moments tied to students' curiosity and inquiries. While the concept of free play has a place in the early

childhood classroom, there are academic learning goals that must be met in kindergarten. In order to be intentional in meeting learning objectives, the teacher integrates opportunities for meaningful guided play.

Intentional learning through play. Guided play is utilized to attain specific learning objectives through play. The two key aspects of guided play include an enriched learning environment and teacher scaffolding. Within the learning environment, toys and objects can be utilized to infuse curricular content in experiential learning opportunities. In addition, thoughtful teacher scaffolding guides the play experience through commenting, co-playing, asking open-ended questions, and exploring materials in innovative ways. Teachers must carefully balance the guidance provided with maintaining the play as child-directed, in the sense that children's needs, interests, and personal experiences determine what is meaningful and useful to learn. The existence of guided play opportunities in the classroom is an indicator of a playful approach to learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

Teacher practices. The responsive teacher provides for the individual needs of children. In a playful learning approach, the teacher acts as observer, facilitator, and mediator of learning through scaffolding with open-ended, thoughtful questions. The teacher is knowledgeable of how children grow and learn, and uses such knowledge to evaluate and support the developmental needs of each child. The teacher models and encourages rich language in her dialogue with students. A skilled and knowledgeable teacher provides the materials and space for play and gently scaffolds learning of children on the cusp of their developmental understandings. The teacher engages in intentional practices before, during, and after play experiences to nurture and extend student learning (Drucker et al., 2007). The teacher builds

warm, caring relationships with her children (Ladd & Birch, 1997), supporting students as they explore, make decisions, and get excited about learning.

Playful learning environment. A positive, nurturing environment (Love, Ryer, & Faddis, 1992) includes hands-on materials to allow learning to occur naturally. The teacher creates a predictable, active learning environment, arranging and organizing the room to provide children access to materials and tools. Open-ended materials allow for exploration, creativity, and discovery. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2015) identifies space and furnishings to be a critical component for supporting learning in the early childhood environment. The existence of play areas and interest centers are two indicators that support playful learning. While a play area is defined as any space where play materials are provided for children to use, an interest center "is a clearly defined play area for a particular kind of play. Materials are organized by type and stored so that they are accessible to children" (Harms et al., 2015, p. 11). Interest centers are a visible indicator of a playful learning approach in kindergarten classrooms.

Critique of Previous Research

There is an extensive body of research on the use of play for learning in early childhood. A strength in play research is that it has utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, seeking to understand and explain the relationship of the constructs of play and learning from both the inductive and deductive paradigms. Qualitative and quantitative studies have consistently shown positive benefits of play and learning through play.

Quantitative studies have reported that the amount of time available for play, particularly child-initiated play, in kindergarten has decreased as academic demands have increased (Miller & Almon, 2009). Quantitative studies have also shown that playful learning as an effective

pedagogy in early childhood (Campbell, et al, 2012; Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

Qualitative studies have examined the perspectives of teachers about the importance of play and how it relates to or may support learning in the classroom (DeVries, 2001; Drucker et al., 2007). Since the researcher is interested in exploring play in the natural setting of the classroom, a qualitative research method is best suited for this research study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain, "Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

Despite the wealth of research studies showing the positive outcomes of playful learning, both short and long term, some studies indicate that the actual use of play for learning in kindergarten is minimal (Miller & Almon, 2009; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). The researcher seeks to understand this apparent gap between research and practice by exploring the beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers related to play and learning in public school classrooms.

Review of Methodological Issues

Different methodological approaches have been utilized in conducting research on play and learning through play. Each of these approaches carries with it inherent strengths and weaknesses, adding a new angle for investigating the research problem and building the body of scholarly literature on the topic of the study. While various methods and methodologies have been used in the field, many of the methodologies are not the best fit for this particular research study.

For example, the longitudinal play studies (Campbell, et al, 2012; Schweinhart et al.,1993; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) build the argument for play and learning through play, but this type of experimental design is not feasible given the length of time available and the amount of researcher control of the research setting. Many of the guided play interventions support intentional learning outcomes (Han et al., 2010) but also are an experimental design requiring control of research sites and participants not feasible for the researcher. Another critique of a guided play intervention, such as the learning of geometric shapes by Fisher et al. (2013), is that such studies have been conducted in lab settings in which participants, or children, are in a one-to-one setting with a researcher. These studies support guided play with one child engaged with one adult, but are not directly transferable to the classroom setting when 20—25 children are engaged with one adult. A desire to study play in its natural setting, the kindergarten classroom, led the researcher to prefer a qualitative over a quantitative approach.

Within the qualitative paradigm, the case study approach has been used to explore in-depth the perspectives and experiences of kindergarten teachers in utilizing play, playful learning, and the wider spectrum of developmentally-appropriate practices. Drucker et al. (2007) utilized a multiple-case study approach to explore the reported decrease of play in kindergarten, documenting the details of life in the kindergarten classroom and eliciting the views of both kindergarten teachers and principals on the role of play and its importance for kindergarten children. DeVries (2001) also examined the attitudes of teachers on the importance of play, looking at the relationship of perceptions of play and learning to different educational philosophies such as constructivism. Goldstein (2007) utilized a multiple-case study approach to describe the classrooms of two public school kindergarten teachers and how they changed

instructional approaches as a response to increasing academic demands. The researcher aims for the current study to add to the existing research on play in the classroom and especially the role and view of teachers on supporting play and learning through play. Case study is often utilized in educational research to explore the perspectives of distinct populations, such as teachers, embedded within the complex environment of the school.

Summary

In seeking to understand the dynamics of play and learning in the kindergarten classroom, the researcher has attempted to remain unbiased even when national reports such as *Crisis in the Kindergarten* (Miller & Almon, 2009) paint a very troubling picture of the current reality. Based on nine recent studies and analyses on play in kindergarten, Miller and Almon (2009) build a convincing argument that public school kindergartens are less playful, more stressful, and not meeting the needs of these young learners as a result of national and state policy. This led the researcher to wonder if the bleak picture of support for play painted on the national level is mirrored in local public kindergartens. Does policy determine practice? What influence do teacher's own beliefs about playful learning influence their teaching practice? What do teachers identify as the influences on their instructional practice? Given the critical role of the teacher in creating a playful learning environment and being at the front lines of learning, it makes sense to speak to teachers and find out from them how they view playful learning and how they support learning through play in the classroom, despite increasing academic demands.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Significant changes have occurred in kindergarten classrooms as academic pressures have increased in recent years. Teachers report, and researchers document, that there is less play in kindergarten than there was in the past (Lynch, 2015; Miller & Almon, 2009). And yet, an abundance of research supports play as the ideal vehicle for learning and development in early childhood (Campbell, et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). Given this apparent gap between what the research supports—play as a primary means for learning in kindergarten—and what current practice tends to suggest—that play, especially child-initiated play, has been pushed to the side as academic demands have increased, this research describes the existing supports for play in public school kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, the researcher was interested in the perspectives of kindergarten teachers who value play and provide opportunities for child-initiated and guided play despite complex pressures that have reduced or eliminated play in the classroom. The researcher sought to describe how kindergarten teachers support play in the classroom while also striving to meet increasing academic demands. A descriptive multiple-case study design was utilized to investigate three kindergarten classrooms within an urban public school district and the complex factors which affect teachers' beliefs and practices about play and its existing level of support in the classroom.

This chapter details the research study method and design. It includes a description of the setting, participants, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis method and procedures, as well as potential limitations of the research design, expected findings, and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

The primary research question explored in this study is, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" The research sub-questions which assisted in answering the primary research question were:

- How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?
- What opportunities for play are provided in kindergarten classrooms?
- How does the classroom environment provide for play?
- What types of play are present in kindergarten classrooms?
- How do kindergarten teachers support play and learning through play?

Identifying the types of research questions best addressed via case study, Yin (2014) explains, "The more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance…the more that case study research will be relevant. The method also is relevant the more that your questions require an extensive and 'in-depth' description of some social phenomenon" (p. 4). Fittingly, this research sought to describe the present support for play in the real-life context of kindergarten classrooms.

The researcher assumed that there may be limited opportunities for playful learning, including both child-initiated play and guided play, in most public school kindergarten classrooms. For this reason, a three-phased approach to data collection was utilized to identify teachers who are providing opportunities for play. An additional assumption was that teachers may take on varying roles in support of the play experiences, such as being very engaged with children during play to allowing children to be more self-directed and only intervening to help resolve conflict or make suggestions. A final assumption of the researcher was that play may be

limited or enhanced through the materials, organization, and physical environment of the classroom.

Purpose of the Study and Research Design

The purpose of this study was to describe the support for play provided in public school kindergarten classrooms. Given the identified purpose, the researcher selected the descriptive multiple case study design as the best fit in answering the research questions. As the name suggests, a descriptive multiple-case study describes a phenomenon (the "case") in its real-world context (Yin, 2014). This study investigated support for play through five key attributes: teacher perspectives on the value of play, the types of play provided in classrooms, the opportunities for play available, the physical environment, and teacher practices before, during, and after play. The primary research question was, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?"

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in the field of education research to build a compelling case substantiating play and playful learning. Quantitative studies report that the amount of time available for play, particularly child-initiated play, in kindergarten has decreased as academic demands have increased (Miller & Almon, 2009) and support playful learning as an effective pedagogy in early childhood (Campbell et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). Qualitative studies have examined the perspectives of teachers about the importance of play and how it relates to or may support learning in the classroom (DeVries, 2001; Drucker et al., 2007). The researcher used a qualitative research method to explore play in the natural setting of the classroom and to develop an in-depth understanding of how play is supported. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained that, "Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means

that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

The topic of this study—the perspective of kindergarten teachers on the value of play and the practices that support play—was investigated from an interpretivist, or qualitative, paradigm. This paradigm "focuses on meaning in context, [and] requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 2). The primary data collection instrument was the researcher, the primary investigator of this study. Creswell (2013) explains:

> We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables which cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices … We also conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. (p. 47-48)

A qualitative study is appropriate, then, for the investigation of complex situations where individuals can be empowered to explain their perspectives. In this study, a qualitative approach was appropriate since the study focused on teacher perceptions of play and learning in kindergarten and the actual provision or support for play in its natural setting—the public school kindergarten classroom.

Within the qualitative paradigm, the case study approach has been used to explore in-depth the perspectives and experiences of kindergarten teachers in utilizing play, playful learning, and the wider spectrum of developmentally-appropriate practices. Drucker et al., (2007) utilized a multiple-case study approach to explore the reported decrease of play in kindergarten, documenting the details of life in the kindergarten classroom and eliciting the

views of both kindergarten teachers and principals on the role of play and its importance for kindergarten children. DeVries (2001) also examined the attitudes of teachers on the importance of play, looking at the relationship between perceptions of play and learning and different educational philosophies, such as constructivism. Goldstein (2007) utilized a multiple case study approach to describe the classrooms of two public school kindergarten teachers and how they changed instructional approaches as a response to increasing academic demands. The researcher aimed for the current study to add to this existing body of research on play in the classroom and especially the role and view of teachers on supporting play and learning through play. Case study is often utilized in educational research to explore the perspectives of distinct populations, such as kindergarten teachers, embedded within the complex environment of the school.

The qualitative methodology in this study was descriptive multiple-case study. The case study approach is an "especially good design for practical problems – for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Yin (2014) defines case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 16). Yin (2014) advises that when deciding between a single-case study and a multiple-case study design, having at least two cases to describe and analyze substantially strengthens the analysis. Having at least two cases blunts criticism about the possible uniqueness of a single case; therefore, a multiple-case study is generally preferred. Creswell (2013) explains that when conducting a multiple-case study, the researcher first identifies an issue or problem, then "selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue…Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue" (p. 99). Each selected case should share a common unit of analysis to show

similarities and differences, with the research replicating procedures with each case (Creswell, 2013). This study explored the perspectives on play among kindergarten teachers and support for play in kindergarten classrooms. The research questions in this study addressed the perspectives of teachers and the support for play in the identified setting of the public school kindergarten classroom. The researcher identified multiple-case study as the best approach to explore the research questions.

The multiple-case study approach requires data collection and analysis of each individual case before cross-case analysis occurs. Yin (2014) recommends that a multiple-case study procedure be followed in which the researcher prepares, collects, and analyzes data for each case independently, in a linear fashion. In this study, the researcher conducted an individual analysis of each case, then examined attributes across the cases. This cross-case analysis provided a way to compare trends or themes in the three cases. While the researcher did not aim for generalizability to the larger population when conducting this study, analyzing and comparing multiple cases strengthens the credibility of findings.

Seminal authors who informed this multiple-case study include Merriam (2009), Yin (2014), and Stake (2005). These researchers have contributed to building qualitative case study as a rigorous methodology for investigating and understanding individual and group experiences within unique contexts. In the case study approach, the case can be understood as a concrete entity, such as an individual, small group, or organization. In this research, the case was defined as the kindergarten teacher within the context of the public school classroom. The setting was bound to one specific urban school district. According to Creswell (2013), the key is "to define a case that can be bounded or described within certain parameters, such as a specific place and time" (p. 98). The data collection in case study draws upon both qualitative and quantitative

methods and includes various sources of information, such as questionnaires, observations, interviews, and the collection of artifacts or documents. In this study, surveys and interviews of kindergarten teachers, observations in three kindergarten classrooms, and an examination of the three kindergarten classroom schedules were used to describe the existing supports for play.

The next section details the descriptive multiple-case study design used in this research.

Research Population and Sampling Method

This section describes, from a qualitative paradigm, the research population and sampling procedures used to investigate the supports for play within the descriptive multiple-case study method. Demographics and characteristics of research participants are described, as well as the process and rationale for the sampling method employed.

Research population. The setting of this study was an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The district serves nearly 50,000 students from PreK to grade 12. The student population is comprised of a diverse population that identifies as Caucasian (56%), Hispanic (16%), African American (10%), Asian (7%), Native American/Alaskan Native/Pacific Islander (< 2%), and multiple/mixed race (9%). The target population for this study was kindergarten teachers in the district who provide opportunities for play and learning through play in some form and duration within their daily or weekly schedule.

Case selection. To select appropriate cases containing the common unit of analysis for this study, support for play in the kindergarten classroom, a survey was sent to all kindergarten teachers in the district regarding perspectives on play and how teachers support play. From those completing the survey, nine teachers were selected who reported to value play and integrate play in the classroom. The nine teachers were selected by assigning point values to the survey questions (e.g. 1=low support, 2=medium support, 3=high support) and then looking at overall

point total as well as participant responses to key survey questions. The nine teachers were interviewed to gather more detailed information on the teachers' beliefs and practices related to play and playful learning in the kindergarten classroom. From the nine interviews, three teachers were selected by the researcher for classroom observations. The three teachers selected for observation articulated a philosophy in support of play and expressed the intentional integration of play to support learning and social-emotional and cognitive development, providing the ideal cases to observe play in the classroom. This study utilized *literal replication logic* (Yin, 2014) to select cases with the prediction of similar results. Consequently, the researcher anticipated that each of the three selected cases would exemplify many of the indicators predicted on the Support for Play Rubric (Appendix A). Cases were bound by setting (the urban school district), grade (kindergarten), and location (classroom environment).

Sampling method. Creswell (2013) advocates that case studies focus on case selection to guide participant selection. In this study, the literal replication strategy was used for case selection (Yin, 2014), since the study involved a focus on teachers who integrate play in the classroom and the factors or variables which support play. Three cases were carefully selected to ensure that each case evidenced play and playful learning within the classroom environment to be observed and documented. Differences and similarities among the key attributes of support for play were investigated via cross-case analysis.

The study employed a purposeful sampling strategy. Patton (2002) explains that purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases. The technique of purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals especially knowledgeable or experienced with the research study's phenomenon or topic of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Other important considerations with purposeful

sampling include availability, willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions articulately (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979).

There are numerous purposeful sampling designs which serve diverse purposes, with the commonality of each strategy being the ability to identify similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2013). For this study, the purposeful sampling strategy of criterion sampling was used. The objective of criterion sampling is identifying and selecting cases that meet predetermined criterion of importance, which Patton (2002) explains can be used to identify cases from standardized questionnaires for in-depth follow-up. The criterion in this study was a self-reported teaching philosophy and instructional practice which values and supports learning through play in the classroom. Anticipating the possibility that an adequate number of teachers would not be identified via the survey for an in-depth interview, the researcher was prepared to utilize the snowball sampling method (Cohen & Arieli, 2011) to recruit more participants. Fortunately, 22 survey participants indicated a willingness to be interviewed, so snowball sampling was not necessary.

Instrumentation

This research study was conducted in three main phases and included three primary data collection tools: an online survey, an interview protocol, and an observation protocol. Each of the measurement tools was aligned to the five variables identified as supports for play by the researcher: teacher perspective, teacher practices during play, types of play, opportunities for play, and the play environment (see Support for Play Rubric, Appendix A).

Phase 1: Online survey. A 26-question survey (nine demographic questions and 17 topical questions) was developed with questions aligned to each of the five variables of support for play. The survey allowed for additional comments and asked respondents if they were

willing to be interviewed for the study (see Appendix B). Survey questions were primarily structured response, multiple choice (single-option variable) and check the answer (multi-option variable) formats, allowing participants to complete the survey in approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The survey was piloted with two kindergarten teachers outside the district to ensure question clarity and alignment to research questions, and to prevent researcher bias from influencing the phrasing of questions. Critique on ease of use of the survey platform by the pilot teachers resulted in slight modifications to the presentation of the survey, although the content remained mostly unchanged following the piloting.

Phase 2: Teacher interview protocol. The teacher interview protocol was adapted from the Sarah Lawrence College Child Development Institute: Kindergarten Play Study (Drucker et al., 2007), the key qualitative research study utilized to inform Miller and Almon's (2009*) Crisis in the Kindergarten* report. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were modified to address the specific research questions of this study, which had a similar primary research question but more detailed research sub-questions than Drucker et al. (2007) addressed in their small-scale study. The in-depth interviews were the primary data collection tool for answering the research sub-question on teacher perspectives, "How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?" The interview questions were piloted with a kindergarten teacher who works outside the district under study to ensure that questions were clear, non-biased, and captured rich content, aiding the researcher in identifying the ideal cases to select for case studies. The researcher anticipated that the 12-question interview, which includes questions such as "How do you view the role of play in kindergarten?" and "What do you see as your instructional role in supporting play?" would take approximately one hour with each participant. Actual interviews with participants ranged in time from approximately 45 minutes to two hours.

Phase 3: Classroom observation protocol. An observation protocol (Appendix D) was utilized for classroom observations in the three classrooms selected as case studies. The three case study classrooms were sites for observations on the key variables identified as sub-questions of the research study: teacher activities (before, during, and after play); student play activities (opportunities for play and types of play); and the physical environment (materials and organization). The researcher took narrative field notes during the observations with the protocol at hand to check off and take notes on indicators observed.

Data Collection

This section describes how evidence was collected in this descriptive multiple-case study. The data was collected from various sources: surveys, interviews, observations, photographs, and documentation. Yin (2014) explains that building a strong case involves using multiple data sources. In this study, collecting information from multiple sources assisted in developing "converging lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2014, p. 120) for data triangulation.

Survey. Case study research, although a qualitative approach to inquiry, may draw upon both qualitative and quantitative data sources. The online survey was a quantitative data collection method used in this study. The survey (see Appendix B) was conducted for two primary reasons: (a) to broadly address the primary research question, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" and (b) to identify potential cases for interview and observation which met the criterion of valuing play and integrating play in the classroom. The survey was emailed to all kindergarten teachers in the district of the study, upon district approval, as part of the purposeful sampling strategy to identify respondents who report to value and integrate play in the classroom (see Appendix B).

The survey's target population was all kindergarten teachers in the urban school district of the study. Inviting all kindergarten teachers to participate in the survey provided the researcher the greatest chance of identifying information-rich cases. Utilizing Qualtrics (2016), a web-based quantitative survey software, the researcher developed primarily structured, or fixed-response, questions to gather basic information on the key variables of this research study. The researcher requested permission and obtained access through the district's department of human resources to utilize the district-wide database for emailing the survey link to all kindergarten teachers in the district. Participants received an email invitation at their district email account to participate in the study. Clicking on the link embedded in the email took participants to an online informed consent form. Participants read the informed consent form (Appendix E) and agree to the study parameters, which granted them access to the online survey. Completion of the survey took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Once the participant completed all required sections of the online survey, the participant clicked a completion button to finalize and submit the survey. A reminder to complete the survey was sent twice to non-respondents over a period of about two weeks before the survey was closed. Once the window of time closed for participants to complete and submit the survey, participant responses were downloaded and stored on the researcher's personal password protected computer for data analysis. Data files were backed up to an external hard drive and a flash drive to ensure security of the data, with both the hard drive and flash drive stored in the researcher's personal fireproof safe for security. The raw data contained identifying information of the respondents within the Excel spreadsheets of data, while the aggregate data being reported in the study has removed all such information.

The methodology of this study was descriptive multiple-case study. The online survey was a descriptive method involving collecting data to describe conditions and answer questions

about people's perspectives on the research topic. The survey was appropriate in answering the research questions by quantifying the perspectives and practices of kindergarten teachers. In addition, the survey allowed the researcher to identify those kindergarten teachers who reported the incorporation of play and were willing to participate in the next phase of the research study, the in-depth interviews. Survey responses provided aggregate data on teacher perspectives of play and support for play in the district. Survey responses were utilized to identify teachers who reported to integrate play and playful learning and were willing to participate in the next phase of data collection, in-depth interviews. The survey data collected from participating kindergarten teachers was considered in relation to other sources of evidence, as one component of the overall description of the support for play.

To encourage online survey participants who met the research criteria to participate in the next stages of data collection—interviews and classroom observations—the researcher offered a small incentive. Teachers willing to participate in further stages of the study were entered in a raffle to receive a $10 coffee card, a small incentive to assist the researcher in identifying the most information-rich cases from those available.

Interview. Through criterion sampling, teachers were identified who valued and utilized play and who were willing to participate in the next phase of the research study: one-on-one, in-person interviews. Research questions for the interview were open-ended variations of the structured survey questions, and focused on the variables of the study to answer the research study's sub-questions (see Appendix C) on teacher perspectives, teacher practices, types of play, opportunities for play, and the play environment. The interview protocol designed and utilized by the researcher allowed ample space for taking notes. An audio-recording device was used to record interviews with the interviewee's permission. The recorded interviews were transcribed

by the researcher, with the researcher's handwritten notes providing a back-up to review participant responses and add to or modify the notes prior to analysis. This checking of the interview notes with the transcription ensured the researcher has accurately recorded the interviewee's responses. If an interviewee denied audio-recording, the researcher was prepared to conduct member checking (Creswell, 2013) of the interview notes for accuracy. Fortunately, all interviewees gave permission for the interview to be recorded. The interview transcriptions were coded for data analysis. Pilot testing of interview questions and procedures was conducted to refine and develop the research instrument, assess and account for possible bias of the researcher, and adapt the procedures as necessary prior to use (Creswell, 2013). Interview participants read and signed the Institutional Review Board approved consent form (Appendix E) prior to the interview. Both the online survey consent form and the paper copy consent form signed by interviewees were identical, with the survey requiring an electronic signature and the interview requesting a handwritten signature to participate. Only one of the nine interviewees expressed any concern about participating in the study and possible risk prior to the interview. The researcher explained her position in conducting the study, her personal interest in the research topic, and the intended goals of the study. After hearing more information from the researcher, the one participant willingly agreed to take part in the study.

The researcher was aware of the methodological threat of reflexivity, in which "[the researcher's] perspective unknowingly influences the interviewee's responses, but those responses also unknowingly influence [the researcher's] line of inquiry" (Yin, 2014, p. 112). The researcher not only had strong personal beliefs about the importance of play in the classroom for learning, but had also acquired a deep knowledge about the many benefits it offers as a vehicle for learning and development. Within the interviews, the researcher tried to be

careful not to express strong opinions or beliefs that may have swayed interviewee responses. Being sensitive to the issue of reflexivity assisted in conducting more reliable interviews.

Observation. Direct observations of kindergarten classrooms that incorporate play and learning through play served as a primary source of evidence in this case study research. From the nine teachers interviewed, criterion sampling was used to identify three classrooms for the descriptive case studies on supports for play. The criteria of valuing play and integrating play in the classroom in an intentional way was prioritized in selecting cases. The observation protocol (Appendix D) was utilized to guide formal data collection and record the supports for play, to answer the research questions and provide rich information about the topic of the study. The researcher spent two full days immersed in each kindergarten classroom: the first day in mid-October for informal, narrative field notes and to get a sense of the classroom environment; and the second day in December or early-January for formal field notes, specifically utilizing the observation protocol to document any indicators not observed during the first visit. The researcher intended to assume the role of a non-participant observer, an outsider of the group under study who is watching and taking field notes from a distance (Creswell, 2013). However, the teacher and children in the room frequently interacted with the researcher so at times she became a participant-observer at the invitation of the teacher and students. Through these interactions, the researcher gained an even deeper understanding of the rich nature of the classroom environment. As recommended by Creswell (2013), member checking of observations helps to ensure reliability of the data collected through observations. Member checking primarily consisted of a brief, informal follow-up interview with each case study participant after the observations to ask questions, share observations, and provide clarity to the researcher in interpreting observations. Member checking also occurred through email

exchanges, when the researcher was reviewing field notes and questions arose about specifics of a case.

Photographs. As part of the observations, the researcher took photographs of the classroom environment while no children were present to assist in answering the research sub-question on the attribute of playful learning environments. Explicit permission from the teachers in each classroom was obtained before photographs were taken with the researcher's personal iPhone. Photos were transferred to the researcher's personal computer and loaded into the Atlas.ti software program, housing the case study database. All photos were labeled with the case number (case 1, case 2, case 3) for organizational purposes. The Atlas.ti research study file, including the photos, was backed up to an external hard drive and flash drive to ensure security of the data, both stored in the researcher's personal fireproof safe.

Documentation. To complement classroom observations, the researcher acquired weekly schedules from case study participants as another data source. Yin (2014) explains that for case study research, "the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 107). The schedules provided valuable information specifically on the attribute of opportunities for play allotted each day or week.

Identification of Attributes

In seeking to understand and describe how play is supported in the kindergarten classroom, the following attributes defined this research study: teacher perspectives, opportunities for play, types of play, the play environment, and teacher practices. These attributes identified the lines of inquiry the researcher investigated to answer the primary research question, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" The researcher utilized a rubric (Appendix A) to document the levels of support for play observed in each

individual case. The indicators on the rubric were used to assign values of high, medium, and low support to survey responses and to identify initial codes within Atlas.ti for coding and analyzing interviews and observations. In this way, each of the methods of data collection—survey, interview, and observation—were aligned to the attributes and the indicators for each attribute. Each category on the rubric is aligned to a research sub-question attribute. The attributes, or lines of inquiry, are described here.

Each case in this multiple-case study was investigated per a common unit of analysis: support for play and learning through play in kindergarten classrooms. Play is the classroom is typically embodied in the playful learning pedagogical approach (Fisher et al., 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009; Weisberg et al., 2013).

Teacher perspectives on play. The researcher was interested in gathering data on teacher attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to play and learning through play. Specifically, the researcher was interested in how teaching philosophies and beliefs relate to practice and the factors which influence teachers' decisions to allow for play in the classroom. Few studies have examined the attitudes and practices of teachers about the importance of play – Devries (2001) and Drucker et al. (2007) being the exceptions, providing the researcher with models for investigating teacher perspectives. In this way, the current research adds to the field of study as it relates to teacher perspectives on supporting play in the classroom. The primary instrument for data collection on teacher perspectives was one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions. The survey included questions on teacher perspectives to identify participants who expressed support of play as potential interviewees.

Opportunities for play. For the purpose of this study, play was defined as "activities that are freely chosen and directed by children and arise from intrinsic motivation" (Miller &

Almon, 2009, p. 65). Reinforcing this definition, the NAEYC has stated, "Child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practices" (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 54). While not directing or controlling the play, teachers may help children initiate the play activities or redirect chaotic or destructive play. Opportunities for play were measured through frequency (how often play/choice time is offered), duration (the length of time of play/choice time), and locus of control (the freedom children have in choosing their play activities).

Play environment. The classroom environment is a critical component which lends support to play and playful learning. The researcher was interested in investigating how the classroom environment in kindergarten classrooms supports play through materials, organization, and layout of the physical space. Harms et al. (2015) define a play area as "a space where play materials are provided for children to use" and an interest center as "a clearly defined play area for a particular kind of play" (p. 11). In these spaces, furniture may be provided to direct or guide the use of materials. They continue, "An appropriate amount of space [needs to be] provided for the type of play being encouraged by the materials and the number of children allowed to play in the center" (p. 11). For example, blocks and dramatic play are more active and therefore require larger spaces. The play environment was investigated using select components of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale 3rd Edition, or ECERS-3 (Harms et al., 2015), modified to the specific purpose of this research study. The ECERS-3 is a quantitative data collection instrument designed to assess the overall quality of early childhood programs which has been tested for both reliability and validity. For the purpose of this research, select sub-scales of the tool were utilized to collect qualitative data on kindergarten environments as they relate to supporting play and learning through play.

Types of play. There are many types of child-initiated play that may be present in a kindergarten classroom. The researcher selected the types of play categories identified by Miller and Almon (2009) who state, "There are different types of play, but they often overlap in rich play scenarios. The well-developed player has a repertoire with many forms of play; the playful kindergarten supports them all" (p. 53). These 12 key play types also serve as a tool "for assessing whether a playful kindergarten is providing adequate opportunity and materials for all types of play" (p. 53). Nine of the twelve types of play were relevant to this study, since the focus was play in the setting of the classroom:

- small-motor play: play with small toys and manipulatives; examples include stringing beads, puzzles, sorting objects, and Legos
- mastery play: repeating an action over and over to mastery; examples include cutting out dozens of snowflakes
- rules-based play: making up own rules and social negotiation to adapt rules for play
- construction play: building houses, forts, and other structures with various materials
- make-believe play, or pretend play: rich with language, problem solving, and imagination; following a narrative or story
- symbolic play: taking an object and converting it into a toy or prop; for example, using a wooden block as a cell phone
- language play: playing with words, rhymes, jokes, poems, songs, storytelling, and acting out stories
- playing with arts: integrating forms of art into play; examples include drawing, modeling, creating music, and performing puppet shows

- sensory play: playing with dirt, sand, mud, water, and other materials with different textures, sounds, and smells

Of the twelve play types on the list provided by Miller and Almon (2009), the researcher opted to eliminate large-motor play, rough and tumble play, and risk-taking play from data collection since these forms of play are most likely to occur at recess, in an outdoor space, or during physical education. While valuable types of play, the researcher's interest and focus was play in the kindergarten classroom setting, not the playground or gym class. However, the researcher noted other types of play observed in the classroom or shared in interviews not reflected in the list of nine play types.

Role of the teacher. The researcher was interested in how kindergarten teacher practices support play and learning through play. To better understand the role of the teacher in supporting or scaffolding play, the research investigated teacher activities before, during, and after play (adapted from Drucker et al. 2007). During free play, while there is minimal adult intervention beyond providing rich and open-ended materials for the free play activities, the teacher is still actively present. In guided play, the teacher scaffolds the play towards intentional learning goals through the materials provided and by interactions with the learner (Gronlund, 2010; Weisberg et al., 2013). Observing teacher practices in the real-life context of the classroom allowed the researcher to document how teachers are supporting both free play and guided play based upon the roles they fulfill.

Data Analysis Procedures

In a multiple-case study, Yin (2014) recommends that each case is described and analyzed separately and then a cross-case analysis conducted to determine themes, trends, and issues that span all selected cases. In this study, the three cases were analyzed separately to

determine the support for play variables and then a final cross-case analysis was conducted to determine similarities and differences of the variables across cases. Summaries and conclusions were based on the evaluation of each individual case and cross-case analysis. Data analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti software (2016), a reputable program with extensive coding and theming tools. A summary of findings for each variable provided a synthesized understanding of how each of the three cases was similar or different in its expression or presence of the play support variables. The following sections further describe the data analysis procedures.

Organization of Data

Merriam (2009) reminds researchers that data collection and data analysis are simultaneous processes in qualitative research; even though they are often presented as linear steps in the research process: "[T]he much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection … The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process" (p. 171). Data collected was electronic from Phase 1 and audio, typed, hand-written, and visual (photographs) from Phase 2 and Phase 3. The researcher transcribed audio files from interviews into text files within Atlas.ti software by the researcher. Quantitative data collected from the survey in Phase 1 was managed and analyzed utilizing Qualtrics software. Qualitative data from the interviews in Phase 2 and the case study observations in Phase 3 was managed utilizing Atlas.ti (2016), the qualitative analysis computer software program which assists with organization, management, and coding of data. Data was organized and labeled in Atlas.ti according to the phase, the case, and the original data source.

Coding of Data

Qualitative data was coded following the two-phased approach recommended by Saldaña (2009). The first phase of coding used provisional codes: "Provisional coding establishes a predetermined start list set of codes prior to fieldwork" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 120). These provisional, or initial, codes were based on the sub-components of the research question reflected in the support for play rubric (Appendix A)—opportunities for play, types of play, role of the teacher, the play environment, and teacher perspectives on play—and expanded as codes emerged during the study. In the second phase of coding, the researcher formulated emergent codes using a pattern coding scheme: "Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 152). The purpose of the first phase with prescribed codes was identifying patterns in descriptions of play supports which align with answering the research question and sub-questions. The purpose of the second phase with emergent codes was to describe and accurately represent any themes which were not considered by the researcher prior to fieldwork but which clearly emerged as relevant from the raw data.

Analysis of Data

Following Merriam's (2009) advice, the researcher analyzed data as it was collected during each phase of the research process. Survey data was analyzed to identify ideal interviewees, interviews were transcribed and coded to identify ideal cases, and the first round of case study observations were coded and analyzed before the researcher conducted the second round of case study observations. The survey data was analyzed and reported according to the five attributes or variables of support for play. The interview data was similarly analyzed and reported according to the five attributes. On-going data analysis allowed the researcher to utilize

emerging notions or ideas from the data in subsequent data collection and make data analysis more timely, accurate, and feasible.

Upon completion of all data collection phases and the analysis of the individual case studies, the researcher used the technique of cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2014). This technique "treats each individual case study as a separate study" (Yin, 2014, p. 164), which allowed the researcher to focus on understanding the individual case findings before moving to the next step of seeking patterns of similarities or differences across the cases. After the findings from each case were analyzed, a cross-case analysis allowed for comparison of the three cases based on the supports for play identified in the research sub-questions and emergent themes which showed up across all three cases. Yin (2014) recommends the use of word tables to display data from individual cases according to one or more research categories. Atlas.ti software assisted with creating the profile of each individual case and provided tools for cross-case analysis.

Internal and External Validation

This section describes how the researcher sought validation of the research study. Credibility and dependability measures addressed internal validation of the study, while transferability measures addressed external validation.

Credibility. To approach trustworthiness and increase internal validity of the study, the researcher employed several strategies in the research process. The researcher studied qualitative research methodology and became familiar with the case study method through seminal authors such as Creswell (2013), Yin (2014), and Merriam (2009). The researcher read about conducting case study research and explored several case study research reports. To establish credibility, the researcher utilized the following procedures recommended by Creswell

and Miller (2000): triangulation, writing with thick and rich description, member checking, peer review, and clarifying researcher bias.

Triangulation of data sources and methods provides strength to the credibility of the research findings, a process which "involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). In this study, data was gathered through surveys, one-on-one interviews, observations, documentation, and photographs. Evidence was in multiple data sources to support codes, themes, and interpretations.

Writing with thick and rich description (Creswell & Miller, 2000) strengthens credibility and allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability of the research design and outcomes to other situations. Stake (2010) explains how rich description "provides abundant, interconnected details" (p. 49). In this study, the researcher aimed to provide thick-and-rich description relevant to answering the research questions while limiting identifying information which was less relevant and could compromise the confidentiality of participants.

Within case study research, member checking is a critical validation strategy. Creswell (2013) explains member checking as "[soliciting] participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (p. 252), a process which Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Stake (1995) says that member checking in case study research allows the participants to direct the research and provide critical observations of the researcher's work. The researcher conducted member checking of the case studies with the teacher participants to ensure accuracy of interpretations and findings.

Creswell (2013) notes that peer review or debriefing "provides an external check of the research process" (p. 251), which also helps address the threat of the researcher as primary

investigator. External reviewers assisted in critiquing and refining the methods as well as field testing the data collection instruments used in this study.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), clarifying researcher bias is as an essential step to developing trustworthiness: “This is the process whereby researchers report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry” (p. 127). In this study, the researcher attempted to disclose biases and assumptions that have impacted the approach to the study and interpretations which may be drawn. Acknowledging bias assisted the researcher in taking steps to attempt to limit the effects of such bias in the study.

Dependability. In qualitative research, the goal of reliability “to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 2014, p. 49), is accomplished through dependability measures which also increase internal validity of the research. Dependability was approached through researcher reflexivity, the use of protocols, and the development of a case study database.

Reflexivity positions the researcher within the qualitative research study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher understands that her presence as interviewer and participant-observer may have influenced the responses or actions of the participants. Wolcott (2010), acknowledging that the researcher brings a background that informs his or her interpretation of information, suggests that researchers disclose “what prompts our interest in the topics we investigate, to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain from our study” (p. 36). Being aware of her own biases, the researcher disclosed her position to participants while remaining focused on understanding the meaning of the research issue to the participants themselves.

To combat subjective interpretations, the researcher developed protocols for interviews and observations. Creswell and Miller (2000) maintain that such protocols are “systematic procedures, employing rigorous standards and clearly identified procedures” (p. 129). The

survey, interview protocol, and observation protocol allowed for clearly documented procedures to collect data on operationalized attributes consistently across all cases. Following the same protocol across sites in this multiple-case study increased the credibility of research findings.

The researcher developed a case study database to assist in organizing and documenting the data collected from each phase of the research and from each participant. Yin (2014) recommends creating a case study database for documentation should readers desire to inspect the entire database beyond what is reported in the final case study report "in this manner, the creation of a case study database markedly increases the reliability of your entire case study" (p. 124). The researcher utilized Atlas.ti (2016) for organizing and coding the data collected in all phases of the study, including researcher field notes and case study documents.

Employing the measures of researcher reflexivity, data collection protocols, and the creation of a case study database, the researcher approached credibility and dependability of the data and of the researcher as the primary data collection tool.

Transferability. The researcher acknowledges that while qualitative research results are not generalizable, the use of thick and rich description helps to strengthen credibility as well as allows readers to make informed decisions regarding transferability. Creswell (2013) notes, "With such detailed description, the researcher enables the reader to transfer information to other settings and determine whether the findings can be transferred" (p. 252). Transferability addresses external validity of the research design. By including thick and rich descriptions of the research process, a reader or fellow researcher may learn from this research, apply the protocols to collect data in other settings, and interpret the results from an informed and knowledgeable position. The researcher attempted to use thick and rich description to assist readers in making a choice about transferability.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

This section addresses limitations and delimitations of the research design. Limitations address external situations out of the control of the researcher, while delimitations address internal situations, or boundary choices, which the researcher intentionally set to reasonably restrict the extent of the study.

Limitations of this research study included the researcher as the primary research instrument, the self-reporting by participants of their perspectives and practices, and the possibility that the purposeful sampling being undertaken to identify ideal cases did not in fact identify cases which exemplified the attributes of the research study. Delimitations, or intentional boundary choices of the researcher, included sampling of kindergarten teachers only, restricting the number of cases for in-depth study to three, and confining the study to one school district. The researcher set these boundary choices to make the research design reasonable within time constraints and available resources; in addition, the research setting was accessible since the researcher lived near the school district of the study. Limiting the number of classrooms under study to three was in keeping with multiple-case study research design (Yin, 2014) which allowed for in-depth analysis and developing deeper understandings of each context and setting.

Considering the research limitations and delimitations, the researcher acknowledges that bias may consciously or unconsciously effect the research process. Confronting and addressing researcher bias is addressed in the next two sections, expected findings and ethical issues.

Expected Findings

The researcher expected to discover that many kindergarten teachers value child-initiated play and desire to integrate play in the classroom, but are limited in their use of play due to both

internal and external factors. Internal factors may include a lack of personal knowledge or skill in how to incorporate play most effectively as well as a lack of confidence in the ability to employ play for meaningful learning. External factors may include lack of support from administrators and fellow teachers, pressure from parents to teach academics, or limited play materials for use in the classroom. The results of this study may add to the existing literature on the reported challenges teachers face in using play in the classroom, as well as strengthen the body of literature advocating for child-initiated play support in public school classrooms.

The identified measures taken to increase credibility and dependability of the data and of the researcher as the primary research instrument assisted in reducing bias in this study.

Ethical Issues

This section describes potential ethical issues of the study. These issues were reviewed and addressed through the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as the public school district's research approval board. Additionally, strategies to mitigate potential ethical issues are addressed. The researcher's position statement and consideration of ethical issues are openly discussed to provide an understanding of the researcher's interests, beliefs, and relationships within the study. The goal of such disclosure is the maintenance of credibility and trustworthiness of data collection, findings, and conclusions drawn through data analysis.

Researcher's position and conflict of interest assessment. To establish integrity of the researcher, Merriam (2009) recommends disclosing the researcher's position as the principal investigator in qualitative research. This disclosure of the researcher's position is also termed "reflexivity" which Lincoln and Guba (2000) define as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'" (p. 183). To examine positionality, the researcher engaged in a conflict of interest assessment.

Conflict of interest assessment. The researcher is in her third year as a public school kindergarten teacher, and was previously a private school teacher and administrator for thirteen years. The researcher professionally knows several kindergarten teachers in the district, but had no personal connection to the kindergarten teachers selected for interviews and observations. The researcher did not anticipate a conflict of interest in conducting or reporting the results of the research, but vowed to disclose any conflict of interest should it arise in the course of the research.

Researcher's position. Merriam (2009) explains, "Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, data have been filtered through his or her particular theoretical positions and biases" (p. 232). The researcher acknowledged that a decision on what was important and what to include or exclude in the data collection, data analysis, and reporting phases of the research was filtered through a personal lens. To minimize potential bias, the researcher triangulated data and attempted to accurately report the research findings as documented through the participant's own perspectives and practices.

The researcher has been a kindergarten teacher for three years and aligns herself with the constructivist/social-constructivist theoretical orientation. The researcher believes in the power of child-initiated play to support meaningful learning, and has come to see in her brief professional experience at the early childhood level that play is an ideal vehicle for learning with young children. The researcher experienced situations in which play was discouraged and viewed as a waste of time as well as situations in which play was championed and viewed as meaningful and appropriate for kindergarten children. The researcher assumed that complex factors would affect the supports in place for play, the perspectives of kindergarten teachers, and the practices employed in the classroom. Reporting honestly on the supports for play in

kindergarten, and potentially the challenges faced when trying to provide for play, was of critical importance to the researcher.

Ethical issues in study. Creswell (2013) recommends that in research design, the qualitative researcher must consider ethical issues arising at each stage of the research study: prior to the study, in beginning the study, during data collection, and during data analysis and interpretation.

Prior to the study, the researcher received IRB approval for data collection from the university and the urban school district that was the setting of the study. The school district granted permission to conduct research. Participants at each of the phases were voluntary and administrators were informed of the researcher's visit at each case study site.

In the beginning of the study, the researcher disclosed the purpose to the participants via an Informed Consent Form (Appendix E). For survey participants, the informed consent was the first question on the online survey and required a "Yes" response for the survey to be completed and submitted. Interviewees signed a paper copy of the informed consent as a reminder of their rights as participants and the purpose of the study. To complete observations, the researcher requested and was granted permission to visit and observe the three selected case study teachers. A gift card raffle incentive for survey participants willing to be interviewed was nominal, providing some motivation to participate but not so compelling as to coerce participation.

To ensure the integrity of data collection, the researcher attempted to avoid deception on the survey and in-person interviews by informing participants of the general nature of the inquiry. To account for the possible power imbalance within interviews, the researcher maintained a relaxed and friendly demeanor, asked open-ended questions, and reminded participants there were no right or wrong answers. Stake (2005) comments, "Qualitative

researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p. 459). Part of this code of ethics as a researcher was knowing that the interview may carry both potential risks and benefits to the participants. The researcher minimized potential risks and increased benefits through credible data collection and reporting practices.

At each observation site, the researcher assumed the observer-as-participant stance (Gold, 1958). In this role, the researcher was minimally involved, known to those being observed but not naturally part of the setting: "[T]he researcher's observer activities are known to the group; [but] participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer" (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). While in the role of observer-as-participant, termed by other qualitative researchers as the non-participant observer (Creswell, 2013; Liu & Maitlis, 2010), the researcher kept in mind, "[T]he act of observation itself may bring about changes in the activity, rendering it somewhat atypical" (Merriam, 2009, p. 232). To combat this potential effect, the researcher built trust with the observation participants by assuring them her role was to document play, not to judge their teaching. In addition, the researcher spent two full days at each school site, providing more time for an in-depth examination of the research topic.

At the data analysis stage, the researcher presented the perspectives and complexities which emerged on the topic rather than her own preconceived beliefs and notions. While the survey findings are presented as aggregate data and therefore pose minimal threat to the individual participants, the interview and case study findings could pose some possible threat of harm. Within the detailed nature of the case study approach, the researcher attempted to protect participants' privacy. As Merriam (2009) reflects on the intensive investigation which is the case study method, "At the local level, it is nearly impossible to protect the identity of either the

case or the people involved" (p. 233). With this in mind, the researcher balanced an honest reporting of the research findings with protecting against potential harm to the participants through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of potentially identifying information not directly relevant to answering the research questions.

The American Psychological Association (2010), or APA, provides ethical standards for researchers that suggest best practices throughout the research process. A key component of APA standards resides in the honesty of the researcher: honesty in evidence gathering, the actual data, reporting findings, and in drawing conclusions from the research. The APA also stresses doing no harm to the participants in the reporting of researching findings, communicating in clear and appropriate language for the audience within the final report, and sharing the final publication information with participants and stakeholders. However, as noted by Merriam (2009) on researcher's values and ethics, the "situational nature of ethical dilemmas depends not [only] upon a set of general pre-established guidelines but upon the investigator's own sensitivity and values" (p. 230). The researcher took these ethical standards into consideration when designing the research project and was sensitive to ensure ethical practices throughout the research process.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology of qualitative research and the method to be employed in this study, the descriptive multiple-case study. The rationale for how this research design aligned to the study's problem and research questions was also provided. Details provided in Chapter 3 included the sample population description, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, validity, limitations and delimitations, as well as ethical issues and strategies by the researcher to mitigate anticipated ethical issues. The researcher's purpose in

providing thick and rich description of the methods was to allow reviewers and fellow researchers adequate information for critiquing and transferring the study's components as appropriate.

While abundant research exists on the benefits of play to learning at the early childhood level, this research explored kindergarten teacher's actual perspectives and practices regarding supporting play and learning through play in the classroom. Although studies exist on teachers' perspectives and practices related to developmentally-appropriate practice, the researcher hoped to build new understanding to the existing literature specific to supporting child-initiated play as one component of developmentally-appropriate practice in kindergarten. The qualitative methodology of a descriptive multiple-case study method with cross-case analysis offered an appropriate fit as a design to address this research issue.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This study addresses the central question, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" The purpose of this study was to describe how play is supported in public school kindergarten classrooms, despite existing challenges (Miller & Almon, 2009). In this study, the primary research question was addressed through the exploration of five attributes aligned to the research sub-questions on teacher perspectives, opportunities for play, the classroom environment, types of play, and teacher practices. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, observations, photographs, and documents. This chapter seeks to answer the sub-questions aligned to each attribute:

- How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?
- What opportunities for play are provided in kindergarten classrooms?
- How does the classroom environment provide for play?
- What types of play are present in kindergarten classrooms?
- How do kindergarten teachers support play and learning through play?

This chapter details the results of each research sub-question by describing the data collected on each of the five identified attributes. Data collection and analysis in this study occurred in three phases: an online survey, in-person interviews, and classroom observations. In this chapter, the data is presented from the three phases as it pertains to each of the five attributes of support for play. The results from each phase on the five attributes suggests that play is supported in some public school kindergarten classrooms in numerous ways. A portraiture of the three descriptive case studies and implications of the results are further discussed in Chapter 5. Identifying information such as names of schools, teachers, and students have been changed to ensure confidentiality of participants.

The research design of this project was a qualitative approach using a multiple case study. In the qualitative research paradigm, the researcher plays a critical role as the primary data collection instrument. The researcher of this study is a public school kindergarten teacher with three years of experience in kindergarten and twelve additional years teaching in private schools. During the three years of teaching kindergarten, the researcher became intrigued in how play enhances learning with young children. The primary research question, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" and the selection of the descriptive case study method arose from a desire to learn from other teachers how to provide meaningful play experiences. During data collection, participants were informed that the researcher was also a kindergarten teacher who valued play and was seeking to learn more about supporting play in the classroom.

Description of the Sample

The setting of this study was a single urban school district in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. The target research population was kindergarten teachers in the district who provide opportunities for child-initiated play and learning through play in some form and duration within their daily or weekly schedule. The purposeful sampling strategy of criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was used as a narrowing tool to identify potential cases of survey participants for in-depth follow-up interviews and interviews were used as a screening tool to determine best fit cases for observations. Due to the three-phase approach this study undertook, there were three distinct participant samples drawn from the research population: the online survey sample, the interview sample, and the observation sample.

Phase 1: Survey sample. The survey was shared with all 190 kindergarten teachers in the district, providing every kindergarten teacher with an equal opportunity to participate in the study. Of the 190 teachers who were sent the survey via their district email address, 61 started

the survey. One participant said "No" to informed consent and two participants stopped the survey within the first few demographic questions and therefore were not counted as respondents. Table 1 shows response rate information.

Table 1

Survey Response Rate

Sent Survey	Started Survey	Completed Survey, First Attempt	Completed Survey, Second Attempt	Total Returned Surveys	Response Rate
190	61	41	3	44	23%

Of the 58 participants who provided demographic information, 14 completed more than half of the survey questions but did not complete the entire survey and 44 completed the survey in full. While participants could skip questions, a glitch in the Qualtrics software also contributed to several incomplete surveys, based on three participant emails sent to the researcher. One participant said the survey froze after about ten minutes, and two specifically noted the question within the survey "types of play" where it froze up, the computer began buffering, and they received an error message.

The 44 completed and submitted surveys represented a response rate of 23%. Fowler (2014) explains that while response rate is "a basic parameter for evaluating a data collection effort" (p. 43) there is no agreed upon minimum response rate deemed acceptable in survey research to generalize to the larger sample population. Since the researcher is not attempting to generalize survey results to a larger population, the issue of the seemingly small response rate does not impact the validity of the data collected via the survey. Demographics were gathered via the online survey's initial set of questions.

Survey demographics. A total of 58 teachers provided demographic information and answered at least half of the topical questions on play. Survey respondents included 54 females and four males. The respondents' identifying race/ethnicity included 47 White/Caucasian, six Hispanic American, two Asian/Pacific Islander, one Black/African American, one multiple ethnicity (White/Hispanic), and one non-response. Regarding the highest educational degree earned, 12 earned a bachelor's degree, 45 earned a master's degree, and one earned a doctorate's degree. Responding to questions about training, 48 respondents said they received some training specific to early childhood and 10 respondents said they received no training specific to early childhood. Reporting their total number of years teaching, 18 respondents had been teaching 16 or more years, 11 had been teaching 11 to 15 years, 16 had been teaching six to 10 years, nine had been teaching two to five years, and four had been teaching just one year. For total number of years teaching in kindergarten, seven respondents spent 16 or more years in kindergarten; seven spent 11 to 15 years in kindergarten; 17 spent six to 10 years in kindergarten; 17 spent two to five years in kindergarten; and 10 had completed one year in kindergarten.

Forty-four survey respondents completed and submitted the entire survey, representing a 23% response rate. The survey was delayed in distribution while the researcher waited for the email distribution list from the district's human resources department nearly two weeks after research had been approved. The survey being shared at the end of May possibly accounts for the low response rate because it is a busy time of year in schools. In addition, 14 of the participants who began the survey experienced a technical glitch in the Qualtrics survey instrument that froze the survey on a particular question. The researcher created a second survey to account for the missing data and shared it with those 17 respondents approximately three weeks after the initial survey was sent out. Of the participants who received the second portion

of the survey to make up for the glitch, only three completed it. Of the 44 total teachers who submitted the survey, 41 were successful with the first survey and three necessitated the second survey to complete their responses due to the software glitch in the online survey platform Qualtrics. Despite these issues, 22 of the 44 teachers who completed the survey indicated a willingness to be interviewed for the study.

Phase 2: Interview sample. Interview respondents were selected based on two criteria: one, they indicated a willingness to be interviewed via the online survey, and two, their responses to the online survey indicated a high level of support for play. The Support for Play Rubric (Appendix A) was utilized to assign point values to each question response, with a higher overall point total indicating a high support for play and a lower overall point total indicating a low support for play. The responses to key questions on the survey (see Appendix B) were also considered by the researcher to identify ideal interview participants. Of the 22 teachers who indicated a willingness to participate in the interviews, ten were preferred based on their overall score on the survey showing high support for play as well as their individual responses to key questions on specific indicators of support for play. Two additional participants were identified as back-up candidates for interviews using the same criterion. A total of nine survey participants indicating high support for play were selected for interviews; eight from the preferred list and one from the back-up list.

Interview demographics. All teachers interviewed were female and identified as white/Caucasian. Teaching experience and training of the interviewees is summarized in Table 2. Four teachers had five or fewer years of experience teaching kindergarten, while five teachers had 10 to 34 years of experience teaching kindergarten. Eight of the nine teachers had experience in teaching additional grade levels from preschool to eighth grade. Most teachers

received a bachelor's degree in early childhood and elementary education, with early childhood training blended in to coursework. Six of the nine teachers had completed a master's degree in education, while three shared they did not because it was not required by the state given the number of years they had already been teaching. Only three teachers had training specifically targeted to early childhood.

Table 2

Teaching Experience and Training of Interview Participants

	Years Teaching Kindergarten	Total Years Teaching K-8	Education BA/BS	Education MA/MEd/MAT	Additional Early Childhood Training
TI 1	10	23	X		
TI 2	2	12		X	X
TI 3	32	32	X	X	
TI 4*	5	14	X	X	X
TI 5*	13	25	X		
TI 6*	13	20	X	X	
TI 7	34	36	X		
TI 8	2	13	X	X	X
TI 9	4	6		X	

*Note. *Interview participants selected for observations*

Phase 3: Observation sample. From among the nine interviewees, three teachers were selected to be observed on support for play within the setting of the classroom. Two of the nine interviewees changed grade levels between the interviews and the scheduled observations, so were not feasible options to observe. The remaining seven interview participants expressed a willingness to be observed in the classroom. To select best fit cases for observation, the researcher prioritized the ability to articulate a strong philosophy in support of play and providing daily opportunities for play.

Observation demographics. The three teachers selected for observation were all female and identified as White/Caucasian. Their experience in teaching kindergarten ranged from five to 13 years, with total years teaching ranging from 14 to 25 years (see Table 2: TI 4, TI 5, TI 6). All three observation participants earned a bachelor's degree in education, two earned master's degrees in education, and one had training specific to teaching at the early childhood level.

Research Methodology and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to describe the support for play provided in public school kindergarten classrooms. The researcher selected descriptive multiple-case study as the best fit to answer the research questions, since it describes a phenomenon (the "case") in its real-world context (Yin, 2014). In this study, support for play was investigated through five identified attributes: teacher perspectives on play, opportunities for play, the classroom environment, types of play, and the role of the teacher before, during, and after play. The investigation of these attributes aimed to answer the primary research question, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?"

The interest of the researcher was to explore play in the natural setting of the classroom and to develop an in-depth understanding of how play is supported. For this reason, a qualitative research method was selected. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) explain, "Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). In this study, the perspective of kindergarten teachers on play and practices supporting play were investigated from the interpretivist paradigm (Merriam, 2009), which focuses on discovering meaning in authentic contexts when gathering and interpreting the data.

In qualitative studies, the primary data collection instrument is the researcher. In this study, the researcher employed an online survey to identify best fit cases to interview, and then the interviews were used to further identify best fit cases for classroom observations. Best fit cases met the criterion of a teacher perspective valuing play and teaching practices supporting play in the classroom. Data collection tools to supplement the observation protocol (see Appendix D) included researcher field notes, photographs of classroom environments, and teacher's weekly schedules. The researcher also kept a reflexive journal throughout the data collection and analysis process to document critical information, decisions, and insights. The reflexive journal proved an invaluable data collection tool to ensure the research was reported with integrity.

Summary of the Findings

Data were gathered through three distinct phases: surveys, interviews, and observations. Within each phase, patterns were gleaned as they relate to the five attributes of support for play. In the next section, presentation of the data and results, the developing themes are presented by attribute: teacher perspective, opportunities for play, play environment, types of play, and the role of the teacher. For each attribute, relevant data and results are presented from each phase.

The alignment of the attributes to data sources is shown in Table 3. The data sources of documents and photos are discussed as they relate to the attributes of opportunities for play and the play environment, respectively.

Table 3

Attribute and Data Source Alignment

	Survey	Interview	Observation	Photos	Documents
Attribute 1: Teacher Perspective	X	X			
Attribute 2: Opportunities for Play	X	X	X		X
Attribute 3: Play Environment	X	X	X	X	
Attribute 4: Types of Play	X	X	X		
Attribute 5: Role of Teacher	X	X	X		

Data on the first attribute, teacher perspective, was acquired primarily through the surveys and interviews because it pertains to philosophy and beliefs and therefore cannot be directly observed. Most survey participants reported perspectives highly supportive of play. Interviews revealed three themes on teacher perspectives: a teaching philosophy supporting play, a belief that play is how young children learn, and a view that the primary role of play is for developing social-emotional skills.

Data on the remaining four attributes were gathered in all three phases of the research. On the attribute opportunities for play, the information acquired from surveys, interviews, and observations generally confirmed that children need daily opportunities for self-directed, free choice play periods. However, interview and observational data revealed that other non-play tasks occurring during play periods may reduce play opportunities for some students.

The information gathered on the third attribute, the play environment, suggests that playful kindergarten classrooms provide well-defined and organized areas for work and play, including some interest centers to encourage specific kinds of play. Such playful environments provide open-ended, interesting play materials in ample quantities to support meaningful play. During interviews, the most frequently mentioned materials were arts and crafts materials and

construction materials, while observations revealed dramatic play materials, art and writing materials, and small motor materials readily available to support play.

Data gathered through the surveys, interviews, and observations on the fourth attribute, types of play, indicates high support by providing multiple types of play in the kindergarten classroom. Interview participants most frequently shared examples of language play, arts play, and dramatic play. During observations, the types of play most frequently observed were language play, dramatic play, and small motor play.

Data on the final attribute, role of the teacher, was also gathered from surveys, interviews, and observations. As reported in the survey and observed in the classrooms, the primary role of the teacher during play is monitoring behavior and responding to conflict. Survey comments and interview transcripts suggest that play advocacy is also an essential role for the playful kindergarten teacher. In both interviews and observations, developing structures and rules to ensure safe, non-chaotic play and learning was the most common theme.

In this chapter, the data is presented as it relates to the individual attributes. In the next chapter, the portraitures or case studies will paint a picture of how these five attributes coalesce to form support for play in real-life kindergarten classrooms.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The survey and interview questions and the observation protocol were formulated to align to the five areas of support for play: teacher perspective, opportunities for play, the play environment, types of play, and the role of the teacher. This section describes how each phases of data collection—survey, interview, and observation—attempted to answer each research sub-question on the five attributes.

Research Question 1: Teacher perspective. The first attribute on teacher perspective was designed to answer the research sub-question, "How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?"

Survey. Five questions on the survey were aimed at gathering data on teacher perspectives. The first statement was intended to gauge how the teacher viewed the existing instructional program for kindergarten and not calculated into the survey respondent's score on support for play. Most expressed the opinion that the current program for kindergarten is not ideal. Responding to the statement "The existing instructional program fits with what I believe is the 'ideal' kindergarten program" 8 strongly disagreed, 27 somewhat disagreed, 1 neither agreed nor disagreed, 21 somewhat agreed, and 1 strongly agreed. Table 4 summarizes the four remaining questions on teacher perspectives.

Table 4

Survey Response Totals on Teacher Perspective Correlated to Levels of Support

	High Support	Medium Support	Low Support
I am allowed to make decisions about how to implement the kindergarten instructional program in my own classroom.	50	2	6
I integrate play as a vehicle for learning to meeting kindergarten learning standards.	51	2	5
What is the primary role of play in your kindergarten classroom?	39	10	9
How do you view play as it relates to learning in kindergarten?	46	12	0

Note. Total Responses: 58

The statement "I am allowed to make decisions about how to implement the kindergarten instructional program in my own classroom" was designed to evaluate the perceived locus of control of teachers (Lynch, 2015). Most respondents felt they had power as instructional decision makers. Responding to the statement, 50 strongly or somewhat agreed (high support);

two neither agreed nor disagreed (medium support); and 6 either somewhat or strongly disagreed (low support).

Most of the respondents reported using play to meet academic learning objectives. Asked whether they integrate play as a vehicle for learning to meet kindergarten standards, 51 strongly or somewhat agreed (high support); 2 neither agreed nor disagreed (medium support); and five somewhat or strongly disagreed (low support). One survey respondent commented:

> I love play in the classroom! If I had my way, I would allow children to really play for long periods without a lot of direction. My philosophy and the reality of not having yet mastered the standards and had experience in integrating play into them makes for an interesting duality of ideals and day-to-day experience of my students.

This comment suggests that while teachers may value play and desire to integrate play into meaningful learning experiences, they may still be seeking a balance between child-directed play and more intentional learning through play.

The survey results showed most respondents believed play to be crucial for the growth and development of the whole child. Questioned on the primary role of play in the kindergarten classroom, 39 participants selected "Play is a means to integrate social, emotional, moral, and intellectual development goals" (high support); 10 selected "Play is a means to further social and emotional development" (medium support); and nine selected "Play is a break from work and motivation to finish academic work" or "Play is a way to make academic tasks more appealing" (low support). In the survey comments section, one participant noted the value of play for both intellectual and social development:

> Those of us who care about promoting cognitive development and social skills through play integrate choice time and play-based learning in their classrooms furtively and on

the sly. Our district deeply cares that we spend designated periods of time on reading, writing, math, science…but has little to say about the important other skills learned in kindergarten.

The final question on teacher perspectives asked how teachers view play as it relates to learning in kindergarten. Most expressed the view that play and learning go together in kindergarten. Forty-six respondents chose "Play and learning are complementary and must go together. Kindergarten children learn through play and demonstrate what they have learned through play" (high support) and 12 selected "Play and learning can go together. Kindergarten children learn some skills and knowledge through playful activities" (medium support). No respondents chose "Play and learning are two different things. There is a time for play and a time for the work of academic learning" (low support).

The responses to the survey questions on teacher perspectives indicate predominantly medium to high support for play among participants who completed and returned the survey. Fowler (2014) notes that the dynamics of internet surveys closely mirror that of mail surveys, including the nature of bias among respondents: specifically, that people who "have a particular interest in the subject matter or the research itself" (p. 45) are more likely to complete the surveys than those who are less interested in the research topic. It is possible that the kindergarten teachers who have greater interest in play and who have a teaching philosophy supportive of play were more likely to complete the online survey than those who did not support play, thus contributing to bias in the survey results. However, the researcher is not attempting to generalize to a larger population from the survey, and having participants who support play responding to the survey would have served one of the primary purposes of the research: namely, providing ideal cases for interviews.

Interviews. The in-depth interviews with kindergarten teachers was the primary data collection tool for gathering information on teacher perspectives. While the survey allowed the respondents to select from pre-determined responses, the interviews allowed more open-ended and detailed explanations of the participants' thinking related to beliefs about play. Within the interview transcripts, a total of 17 codes (seven initial codes, 10 emergent codes) were assigned to interviewee responses falling under the attribute of teacher perspectives (see Table 5). The three codes which occurred with the greatest frequency during interviews were related to teaching philosophy, the view that play is learning, and the role of play for developing social emotional skills. Analysis of the quotations associated with the highest frequency codes allowed the researcher to identify common themes on teacher perspectives occurring across multiple interviews.

Table 5

Code Frequency in Interviews, Teacher Perspectives on Play

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
TP (Play as a Reward)*	2	TP (Instructional Program - Modifying)	30
TP (Brain Research)	3	TP (Teacher Autonomy)	31
TP (Meeting Benchmarks)	4	TP (Student Centered)	33
TP (Work and Play)	6	TP (Play is Mandatory, DAP)*	34
TP (Play as a Break)*	10	TP (Teacher Perspective - General)	44
TP (Definition of Play)*	15	TP (Role of Play, Social Emotional Skills)	53
TP (Instructional Program - Prescripted)	16	TP (Play is Learning)*	54
TP (Philosophy, Reggio)	18	TP (Philosophy)*	68
TP (Role of Play)*	25		

*Note. *initial codes*

Teaching philosophy valuing play. During the interviews, the nine participants referenced their teaching philosophy a total of 68 times. An examination of the responses in

interview transcripts coded with "TP (Philosophy)" revealed a common theme. Namely, the participants shared a belief in the inherent value of play, whether it was developed through intentional research on play or just an instinctual feeling that play was beneficial to young children. One participant said, "I'm a constructivist educator … almost to a fault … And so as a constructivist educator, play is the number one best tool that kids have to construct understanding." The same participant mentioned later in the interview, "Everyone knows how to play. Like, that's not something people come in feeling they have a deficit with. And very much constructivist education in my approach to education is the opposite of deficit-based learning." Another participant mentioned, "Unless you set up an environment where a child can really experience who he or she is as a whole child, I don't know how you can get success academically." A third participant explained her rationale for including play in the classroom in this way:

> I think that kids have the desire to play regardless if we schedule that out of them. Kids have a desire to play. They want to move things, grab things, touch things, stack things, knock them down. They want to do that. They want to create little worlds. They just do. They'll take dominoes and make them talk to each other. They like to play in their world. They just do. So, we do.

The same participant said, "[K]ids will learn that metal is magnetic and plastic isn't if they're playing. And they'll learn that yellow and blue make green at the painting station without me having to do a lesson … they can play and acquire knowledge." A final participant summarized her view about play, learning, and standards in this way:

> Even though we've decided that these really young children need to have all these standards met, we know that they learn about the world and their brain learns about

things through play experiences. And so I feel like it's my duty to incorporate as much opportunity for play and do as much of the teaching and learning that I have, that I'm charged with, through play because I think that's how they learn best.

Possessing a teaching philosophy valuing play ran concurrent with another theme in the interviews, that is, teachers expressed a view that play is synonymous with learning for young children.

Play is how young children learn. During the interviews, participants discussed play as learning a total of 54 times. The participants did not only talk about recess as play or free choice time as play, but shared insights regarding the meaningful learning that occurs in rich play experiences in the classroom. One participant shared how she saw her writing workshop as rich in intentional, learning-based play, explaining "If you're a real author in the world, you gotta live. And if you're five and you gotta live, you gotta play. There's not a very long path between those dots." The same participant stressed, "I believe it in the depths of my heart and my soul and my bones that play is the only authentic legitimate way for kids to learn." Another participant explained how she saw children taking the learning from a whole group lesson and applying it in a play context independently, "They're playing and I'll know that they've really taken it, it's not just superficially learned. It's something that now is part of their schema." This comment suggests that while children may learn during play, they also may reveal their learning in play. Observing the natural learning and development that occurs in play experiences, another participant shared, "They're getting fine motor skills, if they work with play dough, if they work with beads. They're not aware of that. It's not called the fine motor skill station." Another interviewee asserted, "For everything, I think play is how young children learn. It's their work. So as much as possible, everything we do in the classroom should be incorporating or through

the lens of play." Another teacher shared, "Children have to be actively involved with their minds and their bodies and their senses and each other in order to learn. And to make sense of things, which is what they're doing in the world." These comments from interview participants suggest a strong view that play is learning for young children. When elaborating on the types of learning that occur within play experiences, the researcher found that the development of social-emotional skills was a consistent theme across the interviews.

Role of play for developing social emotional skills. While research reveals a broad range of skills may be developed through play (Fabes et al., 2001; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Ginsburg et al., 2001; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006), the interview participants specifically discussed the role of play in developing social-emotional skills 53 times. Most participants mentioned the social-emotional benefits to play as their primary reason for integrating play in their instructional time. One participant intentionally titled her play time "social play" to communicate to others the embedded value. She explained, "It [play] is the only way kids find out about themselves, who they are as social creatures. How they interact with others … There's so much experimenting that goes on in play just at a very social level." The participant went on to say, "How do you learn to develop those [social] skills without the opportunity to practice them?" Another participant saw the social-emotional skill development of play extending to benefit the rest of the day, "There's a community building and friendship building [in play] and then once you have those relationships established I see it transferring to other parts of our day. Where they're kinder to each other. They're nice to each other." Explaining the influences on her decision to integrate play, a third participant shared that "a lot of children do not know how to make friends and be friends." An example she provided was this scenario:

> I'll get kids that will go play in the house area and they have somebody who has to be the mom all the time and then you'll get power struggles with somebody else that wants to be the mom. And then eventually the kids will either take turns being the mom or they'll both decide to be moms and they'll both take care of the babies.

This kind of social negotiation and problem solving was mentioned by many interview participants as a key skill that kindergarteners need to learn and practice in an authentic context such as play. One offered, "to me, it's a huge time of sharing and taking turns. Because I don't have unlimited of everything … You know, just learning to work together." Another stated:

> I think all the learning how we deal with each other, learning how to get our needs met, learning how to solve problems with each other, those are not part of the written curriculum but all those things take precedence over anything else that you're going to do … And a lot of that can happen through play.

While the participants mentioned the role of play in serving other development needs, such as enhancing cognitive development or fine motor development, they overwhelmingly expressed views championing play for supporting social emotional skill development.

Three main themes were identified by the researcher in the interview data on teacher perspectives on play: a teaching philosophy valuing play, a view that play is how young children learn, and a belief that the role of play was critical for developing social emotional skills. These themes emerging from the interview data provided confirming evidence that the participants selected to be interviewed met the sampling criterion of valuing play in their teaching philosophy.

Observations. The attribute of teacher perspective relates to attitudes, values, and philosophies on play and learning. Since this attribute primarily addresses teacher beliefs, which

are not observable, the indicators for teacher perspective (see Support for Play Rubric, Appendix A), were not included in the observation protocol (Appendix D) and appeared minimally in researcher field notes. Consequently, the correlation of teachers' expressed beliefs and their teaching practice is considered in Chapter 5, where the researcher presents the case study portraitures.

Teacher perspective attribute summary. The survey participants communicated primarily medium to high support for play on the attribute of teacher perspectives. This may have been due to a bias among participants that those interested in a survey topic are more likely to respond (Fowler, 2014). However, valuing play was a criterion to select interview participants from survey respondents, so the bias may have assisted in attracting ideal cases to interview. Among interview participants, three common themes emerged from the data on teacher perspectives: a teaching philosophy valuing play, a belief that play is how young children learn, and a view that the primary role of play is for developing social emotional skills. Next, the data collected on opportunities for play through the three phases of the research study is discussed.

Research Question 2: Opportunities for play. The next attribute explored in the data sought to answer the research sub-question, "What opportunities for play are provided in kindergarten classrooms?" Opportunities were defined by the frequency, duration, and locus of control of play experiences. In other words, how often do children get to play? How long do children get to play? Is the child or the teacher directing the play? Data on opportunities for play were collected in all three phases of the study.

Survey. Survey questions on opportunities for play focused on duration of play periods, frequency of play periods, and the locus of control (student vs. teacher) during play. The summary of survey responses is provided in Table 6. The initial question asked teachers if they

provided opportunities for play in the classroom. The teachers who responded "Yes" then were asked about frequency, duration, and locus of control during play. Those who responded "No" skipped ahead to the next section of the survey.

Table 6

Survey Response Totals on Opportunities for Play Correlated to Levels of Support

	High Support	Medium Support	Low Support
I incorporate playful learning in my instructional program.	52 ("Yes")	--	6 ("No")
If yes…			
How often is playful learning integrated in your classroom in an average week?	38	9	5
On a typical day, how long is each play period on average?	3	22	27
Play/choice/center time in my classroom is…	17	39	2

Note. Total Responses: 58

Survey results revealed most respondents provide opportunities for primarily self-directed play four or more times per week. The initial statement, "I incorporate playful learning in my instructional program," allowed for a "Yes" or "No" response. Those who responded "No" skipped ahead to the next section of questions. Most reported to integrate learning through play. Of the 58 respondents, 52 selected "Yes" and six selected "No." Of the 52 teachers who said "Yes" to incorporating playful learning in the instructional program, when asked about frequency of playful learning each week, 38 said four or more times each week (high support), nine said two or three times per week (medium support), and five said once per week (low support). When asked about duration of playful learning sessions, three reported 45 minutes or more (high support), 22 responded 30-45 minutes (medium support), and 27 reported 0-15 or 15-30 minutes (low support).

The final question on opportunities for play focused on who has control of the play, the child, the teacher, or a balance of both. Most respondents reported their play periods allowed for both child-driven and teacher-led experiences. Asked to classify their play or choice time, 17

provided “a blend of child-initiated play and adult-guided experiences” (high support), 39 provided “mostly child-directed, self-selected play” (medium support) and 2 provided “mostly adult-guided playful learning activities” (low support). Two components of playful learning, free play and guided play, are found in classroom environments with the highest level of support for play. A majority support for child-initiated play was also reflected in the survey comments: “As a K team, we strongly believe in the importance of play and advocated for an hour at the end of each day for a second recess and what we call choice time (child-directed free play).” And “Play helps my students bond, problem solve, think, create, persevere. When conflict or social problems arise in our room, I often offer 20 minutes of free play. Kids tend to work out their conflicts via [free] play.” The comments suggest that kindergarten teachers are recognizing the lack of child-initiated play and making attempts to provide that time to students in their schedule, either planned or on an “as needed” basis as in the case of using play periods to resolve social conflicts. The challenge of legitimizing time for play was reflected in one survey respondents’ comments:

> With the pressure to eliminate more and more of our choice time I decided to rename this time “Social Play”. This title more accurately reflects what the time is truly about and gives it more apparent value to those who feel it’s ‘just’ playtime.

In summary, most survey respondents report to integrate playful learning in the classrooms. Play periods occur at a frequency of four or more times per week, in durations of 30- to 45-minutes, and are mostly child-directed, self-selected play. Comments on the survey suggest that opportunities for play are intentionally child-directed to support social skills, such as problem solving and conflict resolution.

Interviews. The interview questions did not explicitly ask participants about the opportunities for play provided in their classroom. However, in several interviews the participant naturally brought up how often and for how long play sessions were provided while responding to another question. In other interviews, the researcher asked about opportunities for play as a follow-up when participants were explaining the types of play offered in their classroom. In the transcripts of the nine interviews, six codes on opportunities for play were assigned to a total of 96 responses. Four of the six codes were pre-determined as shown in Table 7. Two codes, one for general quotations on opportunities and one for mentions of time limitations, were emergent. That is, the codes were not initially set by the researcher but emerged from the data itself. The following table shows that the codes occurring with the greatest frequency during interviews related to locus of control in play experiences and other non-play tasks that occur during play sessions. Examining the data connected to the two highest frequency codes identified two key themes on opportunities for play.

Table 7

Code Frequency in Interviews, Opportunities for Play

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
OFP (Duration)*	11	OFP (Time)	16
OFP (Frequency)*	11	OFP (Other Non-Play Tasks)*	17
OFP (Opportunities for Play - General)	13	OFP (Locus of Control)*	28

Note. *initial codes

Children need opportunities for self-directed, free choice play. Locus of control was discussed 28 times during the interviews. An examination of the interview quotations coded for locus of control revealed an agreement among most participants that children in kindergarten need opportunities for primarily self-directed, free play. One participant explained, “I make time

every day for the kids to really have totally open, within parameters of safety basically, choices about what they want to do with their time." Many referred to the play time offered by the names "free choice" or "choice time" to indicate the importance of student-directed choice. One participant said, "When it's math time, you're doing math. I'm making that choice. When it's choice time, you get to choose and there are enough choices that they're happy." Another participant described her choice time in contrast to the guided play she provides during writing workshop, saying "There's no negotiation for what you're doing [during choice time], what you're looking for, and there's no accountability for what you produce. You just go play." Words and phrases such as *choice*, *student choice*, *student-centered*, *free choice*, *self-directed*, *independent*, and *self-sufficient* were used to describe play in the interviews.

A few participants discussed how math and literacy stations with manipulatives provided guided play opportunities, but for the most part the discussion of play centered on child-initiated, child-directed free play opportunities with minimal adult intervention. For some participants, the rationale for free play was tied to a belief that children's lives outside of school are becoming increasingly structured and less "free" as they may have been in the past. One teacher shared, "Now playdates are so structured and the parents feel like they need to be there [directing], and think that's one of the pieces my students always love so much about choice." Another explained:

> Kids these days have a lot of parent or adult-directed play, which is not necessarily bad but I think it's bad when kids are limited to only having those opportunities and they don't ever learn how to self-direct and self-select and negotiate, change their mind, [and] make different choices.

Given this evidence, the teacher interview data on opportunities for play predominantly emphasized and valued self-initiated, self-directed free play to be provided in the classroom.

Other non-play tasks occur during play periods. While there was considerable evidence of valuing free and independent play in the interview data, another related and possibly contradictory theme arose related to other non-play tasks occurring during provided play opportunities. Many of the participants mentioned that other non-play tasks may limit opportunities for play. Examining the 17 interview quotations coded with "other non-play tasks" revealed that special projects, completing academic work, and being pulled for literacy work or assessments were all activities that happened during choice time in the classroom. Special projects included arts and crafts projects tied to holidays, which the teacher had to supervise and ensure all students completed. One teacher said of her choice time, "The one exception, when I will tell them where to go, is an art project or craft project. If we're making a present for our families or things." Another said, "We had an arts and crafts table that they would circulate to, while at the same time the other students were engaged in play." Completing academic work before play was also mentioned by a few participants. One said, "As the year goes on … if they didn't get their morning work done, they need to do it during choice." Another shared that students do literacy rotations prior to choice time in her classroom, "So they have to do job one, job two, clean up, and then when they get it all done, then they can go to choosing." It was also suggested that academic support and assessments occurred during play periods. One teacher said, "I'm often pulling small groups or individual kids during that time. I pull everybody … It's not just that low kid over there always comes and misses their play time." The teacher explained that she pulls all groups for about 15 minutes a few times each week, saying "Even though I have my 45 minutes of *Explore Time* every day, I wish that I didn't pull kids out of that." She

explained that due to the engagement level of the kids in play, it made it easier for her to do pull outs and not worry about management. Another teacher shared that her educational assistant pulled out the low group of kids at choosing time, "She gives my low group a double dip out in the hallway. And so they, some of those kids don't get as much choosing." She explained that in her language immersion school, the kids received a second choosing time in her partner teacher's class so she felt less guilty pulling them out of play in her own classroom. A few participants also mentioned using choice time to do one-on-one assessments with children, depending on the time of year, and providing individual support to students. The use of choice time or play time for other non-play tasks that are academic and teacher-directed in nature suggests that opportunities for play may sometimes be limited.

Observations. The researcher took field notes during observations in three kindergarten classrooms. Each classroom was visited for two full school days for a total of six classroom observations. The researcher also acquired weekly schedules as documentation to corroborate the opportunities for play provided in the classroom because the schedules may reflect the frequency and duration of play periods. Researcher field notes and the weekly schedules informed analysis of opportunities for play for observations. In researcher field notes of the six classroom observations, four codes on opportunities for play were assigned a total of 42 times. The highest frequency codes for the attribute opportunities for play within researcher field notes included non-play tasks, duration, and frequency (see Table 8). Examining the data connected to the highest frequency codes for observations identified two key themes related to frequency and duration of play periods and non-play tasks reducing opportunities for play.

Table 8

Code Frequency in Observations, Opportunity for Play

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
OFP (Locus of Control)*	0	OFP (Frequency)*	7
OFP (Time)	0	OFP (Duration)*	10
OFP (Opportunities for Play - General)	4	OFP (Other Non-Play Tasks)*	21

Note. *initial codes

Frequency and duration of play periods. In all three classrooms, students had opportunities for free play during choice time and guided play during math centers. On the teacher's weekly schedules, free play periods were 25- to 35-minutes four days a week, with one day shortened (10-20 minutes) due to specials (e.g. art, music, library) scheduled at that time. In all three classrooms, choice time was at the end of the day. On the weekly schedules, math was typically 60 minutes per day and literacy 90 minutes or more. This is consistent with time use studies reported in the research of Miller and Almon (2009), indicating that time for math and literacy typically take up the most instructional minutes in kindergarten classrooms with shorter amounts of time available for play. During the visits, the researcher observed free play periods ranging from 15- to 50-minutes in length in the three classrooms. In the classroom with a shortened 15 minutes of play time due to PE class in the afternoon, the teacher had offered an additional 20 minutes of play time earlier in the day.

In all three classrooms, the researcher observed opportunities for guided play primarily during math centers. The math guided play occurred during both observations in each of the classrooms, approximately 20- to 30-minutes each day. The district-adopted math curriculum integrates extensive manipulatives and games, and a core piece of the math instructional program involves playing games or making patterns or building structures and designs with various

materials. While frequency and duration of play periods may be basic indicators of providing opportunities for play, the researcher observed that non-play tasks, such as finishing academic work, reduced opportunities for play for some students in each classroom.

Non-play tasks reduce opportunities for play. In all three classrooms, free play or choice time occurred at the end of the day. As recorded in researcher field notes, opportunities for play were reduced for some children due to finishing academic work, engaging in a teacher-directed task, or conferencing with the teacher on a behavior concern. The primary reason that children missed play periods during observations was finishing math and literacy work. In one classroom, the students were working on two literacy worksheets and the teacher gave a five-minute warning, "I'm looking around to see who is going to be ready for choice when it's time for choice." Students had to take their work to the teacher and have it checked and corrected before they could pack up and go to a choice time activity. During the first observation, four students were working on literacy tasks and never moved on to choice time. During the second observation, seven students were still working on literacy tasks when choice time ended. In another classroom, the teacher went through a basket of "Work to Finish" from the day and distributed math and literacy worksheets to be completed at the start of choice time. However, the students in this classroom finished their work, packed up, and moved on to choice time within the first five minutes.

In addition to finishing academic tasks during play time, the researcher observed in one classroom that students were required to rotate through the art center to create a "home book box" from a shoebox. The teacher explained that each week, they read a new decodable or leveled reader. Each student gets a paper copy of the book that goes into their classroom book

box for reading fluency practice. After a few weeks, the paper copy books are sent home and students would use the shoe box to store the books in their homes.

The final non-play task that shortened opportunities for play involved teachers conferencing with individual students on behavior issues. In one classroom, two boys who had been pushing each other on the carpet and in line for the bathroom were sent to sit at the teacher table at the start of choice time. Once the remaining students were started with choice time, the teacher went to the table to discuss "red choices" and "green choices" with the boys. In reference to the Zones of Regulation (2016) used in the classroom, red choices are unsafe and green choices are safe. The teacher had a brief discussion with the boys, then quickly sent them off to pick a choice time activity. Another teacher also mentioned that at choice time, she sometimes does check-ins with students who were not making safe choices during the day.

Opportunities for play attribute summary. The data gathered on opportunities for play through the survey, interviews, and observations confirm that kindergarten teachers are integrating play and playful learning in their instructional programs. While survey data suggests most teachers are providing less than 30 minutes of play each day, the observational data revealed that the teachers provided a total of approximately 55- to 80-minutes of play throughout the day, combining the duration of free play or choice time and the duration of guided play during math. Two themes identified in interviews were confirmed in observations: children need to be provided opportunities for self-directed, free choice play, and other non-play tasks occur during play periods. During observations, the researcher observed self-directed, free choice play opportunities in all three classrooms on both observational days. In addition, observational field notes documented that other non-play tasks such as finishing academic work, engaging in a teacher-directed task, and conferencing with the teacher on behavior reduced opportunities for

play. The next attribute of support for play identified and described by the researcher through survey, interview, and observational data was the play environment.

Research Question 3: Play environment. An exploration of the third attribute, play environment, was designed to answer the research sub-question, "How does the classroom environment provide for play?"

Survey. In the online survey, three questions asked teachers to self-report on how their classroom environment lent support to playful learning. The responses are summarized in Table 9. Survey responses indicate that most teachers believe their classroom environment provides a high level of support for play. This includes allowing adequate space, creating defined and organized areas, and providing interesting and ample play materials.

Table 9

Survey Response Totals on Play Environment Correlated to Levels of Support

	High Support	Medium Support	Low Support
My classroom environment provides adequate space for play activities.	41	1	16
My classroom has clearly defined and organized areas to support play activities.	37	7	14
My classroom environment provides a range of interesting materials in ample quantities for children to use during play activities.	45	2	11

Note. Total Responses: 58

Survey participants were asked to respond to the statement, "My classroom environment provides adequate space for play activities." Most respondents felt their classroom space was sufficient to support playful activities. Forty-one respondents selected strongly agree or somewhat agree (high support), one respondent selected neither agree not disagree (medium support), and 16 respondents selected somewhat disagree or strongly disagree (low support).

The next question on classroom environment asked teachers to respond to the statement, "My classroom environment has clearly defined and organized areas to support play activities."

Examples would include a blocks area, a dramatic play area, a writing center, an art table, and a group meeting area. Most reported their classroom environment had well-organized spaces for play. Thirty-seven respondents selected strongly agree or somewhat agree (high support); seven respondents selected neither agree nor disagree (medium support); and 14 respondents selected somewhat disagree or strongly disagree (low support).

The final statement on the environment queried respondents on materials: "My classroom environment provides a range of interesting materials in ample quantities for children to use during play activities." Most respondents felt they provided an adequate variety of materials for play. Forty-five respondents said they strongly agree or somewhat agree (high support), two respondents said they neither agree nor disagree (medium support), and 11 respondents said they somewhat disagree or strongly disagree (low support).

In creating a supportive play environment, most kindergarten teachers in public schools have little control over the actual space to which they are assigned to teach. However, even when space is limited, they can get creative and advocate for expanding their classroom space, as did one survey respondent who shared:

> We [the kindergarten teachers] didn't have sinks or space in our classrooms for art easels and sensory tables, so we also strongly advocated to take over an adjacent non-classroom space that we call 'The Commons.' We share responsibilities for supervision and set-up of materials and choices in that room (usually sand or some type, clay, shaving cream writing, etc.).

Teachers may have more control and flexibility with the layout of their assigned space and the materials they provide to support play, but still face limitations if the furnishings or materials

they would like to provide are not easily accessible. One survey respondent remarked, "The biggest barriers to play in Kinder [are] time … materials, and space."

Interviews. Within the interview transcripts, seven codes were assigned to 106 response quotations on the attribute of the physical play environment (see Table 10). While the observation was the primary tool for collecting data on the play environment, interviewee opinions also provided valuable insights to the researcher. The two codes which occurred with the greatest frequency during interviews were regarding play materials and interest centers. Play materials were discussed 46 times, while interest centers were mentioned 19 times.

Table 10

Code Frequency in Interviews, Play Environment

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
E (Defined/Organized Areas)*	0	E (Indoor Space)*	10
E (Pathways)*	0	E (Play Furniture)*	10
E (Soft Furnishings)*	0	E (Play Environment - General)	13
E (Furniture)*	2	E (Interest Centers)*	19
E (Purchasing Materials)	6	E (Play Materials)*	46

Note. *initial codes

Providing a wide variety of interesting play materials. The mention of play materials in 46 quotations suggested the importance of high-interest, open-ended, and sufficient play materials in the classroom environment. Within those 46 quotes, nearly 100 different materials were mentioned that fell into the categories of arts and crafts, sensory materials, building materials, pretend play materials, books and writing, and puzzles and games. The most frequently mentioned materials were those for arts and crafts projects such as painting or beading; and building materials such as blocks and Legos. Interview participants shared the importance of providing interesting materials, "for kids to be able to explore and use materials

the way they want to," ensuring such materials are "open-ended for kids, that they can construct themselves." One insight revealed when discussing play materials to support different types of play is that teachers bring materials from home, purchase materials themselves, or ask parents to donate play materials. None of the teachers interviewed shared that play materials were provided to them by the school, as compared to literacy curriculum materials or math materials. The primary exception in this regard was math manipulatives included in the district-adopted math curriculum, many of which are hands-on, open-ended building materials such as pattern blocks, Unifix cubes, and plastic teddy bears. A few teachers mentioned that the math manipulatives are sometimes selected by students as play materials during choice time.

Providing interest centers to define play areas. Many interview participants mentioned providing interest centers within the classroom to support and define the play that happens in those areas. One explained how she intentionally has the middle of the classroom set up for table work with all the centers and play areas surrounding the edges of the classroom. The most common interest center mentioned by participants was a dramatic play or house area, which for some changed throughout the year into a post office or grocery store, "just different things if I see the kids playing in a certain way and turning something into something else. I might bring more things that could support some of that imaginative play." Other interest centers or areas mentioned by the participants included art centers, writing centers, combined art/writing centers, science/nature tables, classroom libraries, and listening centers.

Observations. Observations were the primary data collection tool for gathering information on the attribute of the play environment. During two days of observations in each of the three kindergarten classrooms, the researcher took field notes of the play environment, utilized the observation protocol (see Appendix D), and photographed the play environment.

The photographs provided confirming evidence to supplement the field notes, thus strengthening the analysis of the play environment for observations. Research field notes from the six classroom observations revealed ten codes assigned a total of 127 times. The highest frequency codes for the play environment attribute within researcher field notes were related to play materials, defined and organized areas, and interest centers (see Table 11). Examining the data connected to the highest frequency codes in observations identified three themes on the play environment: playful environments provide a rich variety of play materials, playful environments have well-defined and organized areas for work and play, and playful environments provide interest centers to encourage specific kinds of play.

Table 11

Code Frequency in Observations, Play Environment

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
E (Purchasing Materials)	1	E (Play Furniture)*	12
E (Pathways)*	4	E (Furniture)*	13
E (Soft Furnishings)*	6	E (Interest Centers)*	14
E (Indoor Space)*	11	E (Defined/Organized Areas)*	22
E (Play Environment – General)	11	E (Play Materials)*	33

Note. *initial codes

Playful environments provide a rich variety of play materials. In all three classrooms, the researcher observed a wide variety of open-ended play materials available to enhance student play experiences. Categorizing the play materials available to support play, the researcher noted dramatic play materials, art and writing materials, and small motor materials to be the most readily available.

Of all play materials, dramatic play materials in a defined dramatic play area were most notable in their availability and use by students in the three classrooms. The following dramatic

play materials were observed in the classrooms: toy kitchen, dollhouse, baby carriage, stroller, high chair, cash register, shopping cart, baby dolls, play food, dishes, house toys (ex: toy cell phone), medical tools, dress up clothes and accessories, stuffed animals, puppets, Groovy Girl dolls, Barbie dolls, Littlest Pet Shop animals, My Little Ponies, and miniature animal and people figurines.

A variety of art and writing materials were also observed in all three classrooms. Researcher field notes documented the following art and writing materials available to support play: easels, tempera paint, watercolor paint, crayons, markers, pens, pencils, stencils, stamps, stickers, a variety of paper, notepads, scissors, fancy scissors, tape, whiteboards and whiteboard markers, and clipboards. Many of these materials were observed being accessed during work times as well as play times.

Small motor materials, such as small toys and manipulatives, were also observed in all three classrooms. The small motor materials noted from classroom observations included: puzzles, Legos, Polydrons, pattern blocks, Unifix cubes, geoboards, teddy bear counters, dice, marbles, wooden cubes, dominoes, plastic links, beads, puff balls, and fine motor tweezer tongs. Small motor materials were frequently used during guided play experiences in math in all three classrooms.

Some play materials were observed in individual classrooms but were not common across all three rooms or necessarily observed during both visits to the same classrooms. In the initial visit to one classroom, a science table held a large magnifying glass on a tripod with nature specimens of twigs, leaves, acorns, and sunflowers. The initial visit to another classroom revealed a firefighter dress up box to accompany the current unit on community helpers. During the final visit to the third classroom, an Inventions space in the art corner provided a laundry

basket full of recyclable materials: tissue boxes, snack boxes, raspberry containers, and toilet paper rolls. Tape, scissors, and markers were available in the inventions space for construction. The researcher noted that while many of the same play materials were accessible and used by students during play over the course of both visits, all three classrooms had play materials rotate in some spaces to support specific curricular goals.

Playful environments have well-defined and organized areas for work and play. Clearly defined and organized areas were found in all three classrooms. The following similarities were observed in the three rooms: a carpeted whole group meeting area, work tables for independent and small group work in the central space, play areas and interest centers around the perimeter, and materials organized in labeled bins or baskets accessible to children during play.

During the observation visits, the researcher noted that all whole group instruction occurred with the students seated on the floor in a defined carpet area and the teacher on a chair in front of the students. All three teachers utilized a flip chart easel at select times for whole group instruction. In one classroom, the group meeting area was used for circles at the beginning and end of the day as well.

When the class transitioned from whole group work to small group or independent work, the students moved to tables in the central area of the room. In the three classrooms, one had kidney shaped tables for student seating, one had round tables, and one had rectangular tables. In two of the three classrooms, the tables were color-coded and the materials for each table matched the color-coding. In one, four kidney shaped tables formed a sort of circle in the middle of the room with the teacher's and assistant's rolling chairs in the middle—green, turquoise, red, and orange. The materials for the table group, including pencil bins, crayons, scissors, and glue, all were labeled with masking tape of that color on the supply shelves. In the other, six round

tables were coded by color and shape (ex: green triangle, orange square) and the students' literacy materials, such as writing journals, decodable readers, and the day's worksheets, were placed in the colored tubs.

Materials for play were organized around the periphery in each of the classrooms, mostly in labeled baskets and bins on shelves in the space where the materials were to be used. Large wooden blocks in the three classrooms were stored on shelves or in large crates near the carpeted areas where they were used during choice time. The dramatic play materials were kept within the dramatic play area of each room. In one of the classrooms, laundry baskets were on the shelves in the dramatic play corner, clearly labeled with a picture and name of what was inside each basket: stuffed animals, puppets, medical tools, food, dress up, Groovy Girls, and house toys. In another classroom, a wall of bookshelves running the entire length of the room under the windows was utilized to organize play materials into the sections of the room in which they were primarily used.

In all three classrooms, some play areas were defined by carpets or foam interlocking squares, while others were created through the strategic placement of play furniture or bookshelves. It was apparent to the researcher that the expression "a place for everything, everything in its place" (Franklin, n.d.) was a mantra fitting for these three playful classrooms.

Playful environments provide interest centers to encourage specific kinds of play. Just as the use of interest centers was a common theme among interviewees, the presence of interest centers was observed in all three kindergarten classrooms. Harms et al. (2015) differentiate between play areas and interest centers with the following explanation: "A 'play area' is a space where play materials are provided for children to use. An 'interest center' is a clearly defined

play area for a particular kind of play" (p. 18). The three classrooms evidenced a combination of both play areas and interest centers.

The dramatic play corner was the most visible interest center in the three classrooms. All had a play kitchen, a miniature table and chairs, play food and dishes, and baby dolls to encourage make-believe play, or playing house. Although it may not qualify as an interest center using Harms et al.'s (2015) definition, the other common space among the three classrooms was a calm down quiet space to assist students with emotional regulation needs. In one of the classrooms, the area was called the *Feelings Space*, containing a bean bag chair, a feelings poster, and a plastic drawer organizer with squishy stress reliever balls, fidgets, and stuffed animals. In another room, a collection of large and small pillows at the back of the room provided a quiet area for students to use. In the third room, a large wooden bench was labeled *Break Zone* and bins in the bench contained sensory tools to be used in the space. In two of the three classrooms, the calming space was used during observations at various times of the day. The other interest center observed in two of the classrooms was an art center. In these two classrooms, a defined space in the classroom was designated for art activities. In both, an art easel, drying racks, and a sink were accessible by the students. Paint, paintbrushes, trays, and paper were available for use during choice time.

In all the classrooms, additional play materials were intentionally arranged into defined spaces, or play areas. For example, construction materials were frequently placed near a carpet area, such as blocks, Lincoln Logs, or Legos. In this way, the carpet area used for whole group lessons doubled as the construction area during play times. In observational field notes, the code "interest centers" was assigned concurrently with "play furniture" in many instances, suggesting the role of play furniture like kitchens and easels in defining interest centers.

Play environment attribute summary. Data gathered through the survey, interview, and observational phases of the study suggests that playful kindergarten environments provide well-defined and organized areas for work and play, including interest centers to encourage specific kinds of play. The observations revealed that playful environments are well-organized and have defined areas for whole group meetings (typically a carpeted area), work tables in the center, interest centers and play areas along the perimeter, and play materials organized in bins and baskets accessible to children. The data gathered on play environments confirms that teachers are providing open-ended, interested play materials in ample quantities to support play. In interviews, the most frequently mentioned play materials were arts and crafts materials and building materials. In observational field notes, the play materials noted with greatest frequency were dramatic play materials, art and writing materials, and small motor materials. The data gathered on the play environment reveals the existence of defined and organized work and play areas, as well as rich, open-ended play materials supporting play in kindergarten classrooms. Providing interesting play materials in the environment encourages various types of play, the fourth attribute of support for play identified and described in this study.

Research Question 4: Types of play. The next attribute on types of play was designed to answer the research sub-question, "What types of play are present in kindergarten classrooms?" Miller and Almon (2009) assert that the playful classroom environment supports a large variety of types of play, since different types of play appeal to children and support diverse learning goals.

Survey. Survey respondents were asked about the types of play provided within their classrooms. Due to a technical glitch with the Qualtrics survey platform, 14 of the 58 respondents were stopped at this point in the survey and were unable to complete the questions in

the final two areas: types of play and role of the teacher. As reported to the researcher by three participants, the survey froze on the next question and would not allow the participants to continue or restart the survey.

Of the 58 initial respondents, 44 were successful in reporting on the next question, "What types of play take place in your classroom?" This matrix-style question listed nine primary types of play that may be taking place in kindergarten classrooms identified in research by Miller and Almon (2009). The question provided a tenth "other" option and asked teachers to fill in the blank if they were offering additional play types not covered by the nine listed. In general, the more play types offered within a classroom environment, the higher level of support for play is indicated. Table 12 provides a summary of the responses to types of play.

Table 12

Survey Response Totals on Types of Play

	Yes	No
Small motor play	43	1
Mastery play	16	28
Rules-based play	41	3
Construction play	42	2
Make-believe play	40	4
Symbolic play	36	8
Language play	36	8
Playing with arts	43	1
Sensory play	29	15

Note. Total Responses: 44

Most respondents indicated that a wide variety of play types are supported in their classrooms. "Yes" responses totaled small motor play, 43; mastery play, 16; rules-based play, 41; construction play, 42; make-believe play, 40; symbolic play, 36; language play, 36; playing with arts, 43; and sensory play, 29. Eight respondents indicated "other" play, described as: iPad; creating with craft materials; house/kitchen area; dress up drama play area; large motor: bowling, bean bag toss; computer time; puzzles; listening center; books; and play dough.

Most respondents offer multiple types of play within their classrooms, suggesting a high level of support for play by these 44 teachers. The play types which are most prevalent among respondents include small motor play (playing with small objects such as stringing beads, puzzles, sorting objects, Legos), playing with arts (integrating forms of art into play, drawing, modeling, creating music, performing puppet shows), construction play (building houses, forts, and other structures), and rules-based play (making up own rules, social negotiation to adapt rules for play situations). Mastery play (repeating an action over and over to mastery, such as making dozens of bows for birthday packages) and sensory play (playing with dirt, sand, mud, water, and materials with different textures, sounds, and smells to develop senses) are the two primary types of play that may be least supported in kindergarten classrooms based on the participant responses.

The survey responses suggest that many kindergarten teachers are providing a rich variety of playful experiences. Supporting many different types of play experiences with a variety of interesting and open-ended materials enhances learning within a playful kindergarten classroom (Gronlund, 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009).

Interviews. Within the nine interview transcripts, 14 codes were assigned to a total of 201 quotations on the attribute types of play (see Table 13). The three codes which occurred with the greatest frequency during interviews were related to language play, arts play, and dramatic play.

Table 13

Code Frequency in Interviews, Types of Play

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
ToP (Symbolic)*	1	ToP (Gross Motor/Recess)	14
ToP (Mastery)*	5	ToP (Guided Play)*	16
ToP (Gross Motor/Physical)	6	ToP (Small Motor/Manipulative)*	18
ToP (Rules-Based)*	6	ToP (Construction)*	19
ToP (Other/Ambiguous)	8	ToP (Dramatic Play)*	20
ToP (Types of Play, General)	8	ToP (Playing with Arts)*	24
ToP (Sensory)*	9	ToP (Language)*	47

Note. *initial codes

Language play. In the interviews, 47 quotations were coded for language play. Examining the quotations, examples of playing with language were provided in the contexts of both free play and guided play scenarios. In free play, many participants mentioned looking at books in the classroom library, listening to stories or rhymes at the listening center, and creating books and drawings and cards at the writing-art center. One participant shared:

> The group of children who gravitate to the writing center are the little writers. And [they] spend almost every day for some amount of their play time making books, drawing pictures, adding a word they know, and then building their risk-taking skill and the letter-sound skills to be able to start to create words and then sentences and then they're making stories. That's their play supporting the skills they're learning.

Another described, "I had a little girl who loved making books, and other ones who just, they made their book and it was just pictures or maybe just a few letters, but it was very suited to them." Several participants mentioned the importance of free play for oral language development due to the social interactions taking place. Another participant shared how she built in authentic writing to play experiences when kids requested a certain material be brought into the room, "They write it down on a note and I go to the Dollar Store or Target and pick it up

… in their kid writing." Many of the interview quotations coded for language play were examples of more guided play scenarios in the context of writer's workshop, reader's workshop, and inquiry-based explorations driven by students. During writer's workshop, one participant shared, "I had a girl in my class who was just obsessed with princesses. And she wrote amazing, beautiful princess stories that were not Disney storylines … And they were compelling and necessary to the princess genre." Another interviewee who viewed writing workshop as play explained, "When they're sitting down with their paper and they're choosing and they're deciding what mark they're going to put where, that's kind of a play with writing." In reader's workshop, one participant mentioned the Daily 5 as integrating some play-based strategies, such as word games within the Working with Words component, "[Y]ou're doing games with words. So it can be play-based, but it's not free play. And it takes a lot of preparation." Another participant shared that a student-driven interest in boat building with tin foil boats led to an extended period when, during choice time, "I would get out a big tub of water and make sure there were materials and I'd hang out there for a while, talking with kids and just slipping in vocabulary." A few participants also shared how they integrated music and rhymes to support literacy and language skills, such as an ASL alphabet song used by one participant with movements to teach letter names and letter sounds in a fun and whole-body way. These examples of both free play and guided play scenarios evidence some of the forms of language play reported by interviewees.

Playing with arts. In the nine interviews, 24 quotations were coded for playing with arts, with some coding co-occurrence with the code language play. All the interview participants mentioned supporting playing with arts in some form within their kindergarten classroom. Many participants shared that they provided opportunities for open-ended creation with 2-dimensional

and 3-dimensional art materials during play periods. One participant explained that at her writing-art center, “They’ll be creating whatever and we just pull out lots of markers and crayons and glue sticks and I put scraps of things over there. I mean, I’ve brought bubble wrap from home and pieces of Styrofoam.” Similarly, another participant talked about the *Creation Station*, where “Toilet paper tubes will be over there and cardboard boxes from cereal and what not, and they’re cutting things up and taping things together and making super cool creations.” Other forms of playing with the arts mentioned included drawing, coloring, tempera painting, watercolor painting, and stenciling. A few teachers expressed a desire to do more with the arts was limited due to space, time, and the messiness it involved. One participant who expressed she was “bad at the painting” explained, “I don’t want to deal with the mess. I have a small classroom … I just don’t have the space for it. And I just love, I personally love mixing color and playing with colors.” Another participant shared, “It’s very difficult for me to allow messy things … that complete and utter mess of play. Painting I can only do every once in a while, or with a parent helping.” Some of the teachers shared that playing with arts in their classroom took the form of more teacher-directed special projects at the arts and crafts table, where a small group of children would rotate through to complete the activity, such a painting, and all the students would complete that project over the period of several days. Finally, several teachers mentioned the integration of music. One shared that the primary means of letter and sound instruction in her classroom was an ASL alphabet song, while another participant explained, “I do a lot of my literacy teaching through music and chanting … That can be seen as a form of play, I think, so I try to use quite a bit of that throughout the day in all areas of the curriculum.” A third interview participant who discussed music integration as a type of play shared, “On rainy days we put in CDs and we’re jumping and we’re dancing.” These examples of playing with the

arts reveal how the kindergarten teachers are using the arts in both free play and guided play scenarios in the classroom.

Dramatic play. Most interview participants mentioned offering a dramatic play area or creative play corner to support pretend play. Several reported to have play kitchens, puppet theatres, and doll houses with the corresponding play materials—dress up clothes, puppets, dolls, my little ponies, stuffed animals—to provide for pretend play. One shared that in her house area, the kids "kind of take on roles. Or, if not the kids, the object they're playing with takes on a role." The same teacher explained, "I have some shy children that will act things out in play but won't do that with a partner in class. But they'll do it with a puppet or a doll or a My Little Pony." A few of the teachers made observations that pretend play in the classroom is not just limited to the designated pretend play corner. One teacher reflected, "The build it [construction play] ends up being a lot of role play, because they use the toys to create conversations and scenarios." Another participant similarly observed, "The truth is, you can do dramatic anywhere. We just have a space in the room called dramatic play. But if you're building with blocks, you can do dramatic play. And if you're drawing, you can do dramatic play." One interviewee shared how she incorporated dramatic play into her read aloud sessions to support content acquisition, explaining "Anytime children have an opportunity to put something into their bodies, they're going to understand it better … When we play out the lifecycle of a butterfly from the tiny egg to the caterpillar, through the whole thing." One teacher mentioned that a challenge of dramatic play was having "the resources, the time, to really manage the hats, the clothes, and the hugging … because when it's whole body, the kids get really energetic and into it." As a whole, the teachers interviewed communicated strong support for dramatic play in their kindergarten classrooms.

Observations. The attribute on types of play was included on the observation protocol (see Appendix D) to document the actual types of play taking place in the three kindergarten classrooms. Beyond the availability of the materials to support these types of play, the researcher was intent on documenting instances of students and teachers engaging in various types of play. Over the course of two full days of observation in each of three classrooms, 14 codes related to types of play were assigned to 194 field note quotations (see Table 14). The three most frequent codes on types of play during observations included language play, dramatic play, and small motor/manipulative play.

Table 14

Code Frequency in Observations, Types of Play

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
ToP (Gross Motor/Physical)	*2*	ToP (Other/Ambiguous)	*12*
ToP (Guided Play)*	*2*	ToP (Playing with Arts)*	*12*
ToP (Symbolic)*	*4*	ToP (Rules-Based)*	*17*
ToP (Mastery)*	*5*	ToP (Construction)*	*19*
ToP (Types of Play, General)	*5*	ToP (Small Motor/Manipulative)*	*31*
ToP (Sensory)*	6	ToP (Dramatic Play)*	*32*
ToP (Gross Motor/Recess)	*7*	ToP (Language)*	*78*

Note. *initial codes

Language play in classrooms. Miller and Almon (2009) provide the following examples of language play: playing with words, rhymes, jokes, poems, songs, storytelling, and acting out stories. In the three classrooms, language play was most the most prevalent form of play observed, with 78 field note quotations coded. Language play was observed in interactions between teachers and students, students and students, and students and parents. An extensive amount of the language play was teacher initiated, modeling and practicing oral and written language. Teachers modeled and encouraged language through playful songs, chants, poems, read aloud stories, and writing.

Songs, chants, and rhymes were used across the three classrooms to aid transitions, teach content, communicate expectations, and encourage movement. In one classroom, the teacher started singing a familiar song and students joined in as they were transitioning to the carpet from seatwork, settling calmly into the circle. Researcher field notes documented the use of songs and chanting for transitions 17 times. Teachers also used songs and chants to teach content across the three classrooms, including apple trees, weather, number formation, days of the week, months of the year, holidays, and sight words. In the same classroom, the teacher used an interactive song to teach sight words, having students say, spell, clap, whisper, and air-write each word. The use of songs, chants, and poems to teach content was observed eight times. A common use for songs and chants was to communicate expectations. In another classroom, the teacher sang as students were gathering on the carpet, "Open and shut them, open and shut them, then you're going to clap, clap, clap; Open and shut them, open and shut them, put them in your lap, lap, lap!" encouraging students to have safe hands. Field notes documented that teachers used songs and chants five times to remind students of expectations. In one of the classrooms, singing and dancing was used when students were getting wiggly on the carpet. The teacher had the students stand and they all sang and danced together: "We're gonna wiggle, we're gonna jump, we're gonna stomp." In the same classroom, the teacher used the online website GoNoodle (2017) for movement breaks, which guides students to sing and dance while also practicing skills like patterning or syllabication.

In one case study classroom, the teacher helped students see the connection between oral language and print by creating an "I Can Read" folder that went home each week to share with parents. The teacher taught a new song or chant each week, which was practiced every day, and then on Friday the students received a printed copy of the song to illustrate and put into a

pronged folder to take home and sing to parents. The folder returned the following week for students to receive the next poem or song. The use of songs, chants, and poems in all three classrooms encouraged language play between teachers and students, which students then carried into their own play. For example, in the classroom where the teacher taught a new song or chant each week, the researcher observed students singing the songs to themselves or with a peer while completing independent work later in the day.

In all three classrooms, the use of interactive read aloud stories were observed to teach content, model fluent and expressive reading, and engage students in storytelling. In one room, students made animal puppets to accompany the story about a bear that hibernates through the winter and then comes out to meet all the other animals in the spring. The students played with their puppets as the teacher read the story. The students became shared storytellers, having their puppets say the character dialogue with expression.

The teachers in the three classrooms guided their students in playing with written language in various ways. In one room, a morning message was written by the teacher with the help of the students to sound out words and apply grammar rules while previewing the day ahead. In two of the classrooms, a student-driven writer's workshop time was observed in which students selected their own writing topics and then had an opportunity to share their writing with peers. When deciding what to write, one boy told his table with excitement, "I'm going to write about making Cheez-Its!" and then eagerly began drawing. In another room, the teacher sat with students and asked each to read their kid writing. One boy pointed to a long string of letters under his picture and read, "The giant alligator terrorizes the city." The teacher responded, "Oh wow! You're such a good writer. Do you want to teach the writing lesson tomorrow?" In both classrooms, student writing was celebrated through sharing with partners and the whole group.

While the teacher initiated much of the language play observed in the classrooms, the researcher documented several examples of students engaged in telling stories and jokes of their own. Storytelling frequently coincided with other forms of play, such as small motor or dramatic play. In one room, the students were in small groups and partners for math centers. Most of the math centers were hands-on construction type materials or number games. One of the math centers was a bucket of plastic bugs that students were supposed to be counting on 10 frame mats. The researcher was seated near the bugs and observed as every pair or small group of kids came to the bug table and immediately began making up stories with the bugs. Two girls sitting at the table grabbed handfuls of bugs and then searched for the spiders. One yelled excitedly, "I got two spiders!" The other pretended one spider was biting the other bugs, "Spider, spider, spider, help us, get the bad guy!" The girl beside her joined in the play, attacking the middle girl's bug with her own spider, dropping it from high in the air. Both girls weaved between making observations about the characteristics of the bugs and telling their stories, paying little attention to the counting mats.

In another classroom, storytelling by students occurred during play with Legos. Three boys were on the carpet with a large Lego tub and a Lego airplane. One said, "I'm going to make a jail mission. I need pieces." He was sitting and singing to himself and telling a story only he could hear. The other two boys had the plane and were working together to put the pieces on to make wings: "I know, it can be a cockpit, no it can be luggage," as he attempted to put a Lego piece inside the plane door.

In the third classroom, the researcher observed two boys engaged in their own storytelling during a special lunch-time pizza party in their classroom. They were talking about becoming wolves. The first exclaimed, "I want to become a wolf and eat raw meat. That would

be delicious!" The other commented, "Raw meat can make you sick. Maybe you should make a fire to cook it." The first responded, "I would eat it raw. Ahhh!" while making claws with his hands and raising them in the air.

In the same classroom during choice time, the researcher was taking field notes of construction play on the carpet. One of the boys walked up and asked, "What are you typing?" The researcher responded, "I'm just watching and writing what I see in your room." He then dictated, "Write this. Three boys are on the carpet playing blocks with monster trucks. And cars. The cars try to get past them. Those boys' names are Luke and Ollie and Richard." Stepping into the role of participant-observer (Creswell, 2013), the researcher typed the child's dictation into field notes, then moved away to another play area to allow the child to reengage in his play scenario.

Language play between teachers and students as well as between students and students, was observed in all three classrooms. In one of the classrooms, the researcher also observed language play between parents and students as part of the morning routine. Once students signed in and hung up backpacks and coats, they grabbed books and joined their parents in shared reading. One boy grabbed a book about bugs from his book box and sat down by his mom, who said, "Let's bug out!" The mom was asking questions about the book, building excitement before they even started reading. "Oh my gosh, he just caught a bee!" the boy yelled as mom turned to the first page. Before she could begin reading, he continued, "Do you know what? When you hold a grasshopper, it sprays poop in your hand out of its mouth, then it flies away, that's how it gets its energy."

From these observations of language play in kindergarten classrooms, it seems the teacher plays a valuable role in modeling and practicing oral and written language to scaffold

student learning, and then allowing students opportunities to engage in their own play with words and songs and stories. The researcher observed that student language play frequently occurred within dramatic play scenarios, the second most frequent type of play documented in field notes.

Dramatic play in classrooms. Dramatic play was documented in 32 instances in researcher field notes during observations. Dramatic play is synonymous with make-believe play, or pretend play. Miller and Almon (2009) explain that such play begins with "Let's pretend" and is rich with language, problem solving, and imagination. Such play follows a narrative or storyline created by the players. All instances of dramatic play documented by the researcher were student-initiated, predominantly during free choice play periods. In the three classrooms, the teacher observed dramatic play scenarios within the dramatic play center. It also occurred simultaneously with other types of play, such as construction play and small motor play.

In one classroom, two girls were playing make-believe in the kitchen/home area. One was a kitty, making a mess with pots and cups and play food. She said to the other, "Now you're mad at me, and I have to clean it all up." The kitty was on all four on the floor and the mom was sitting in a chair, telling the kitty, "Go to your box or I'm calling the cops. Now you're going to watch, kitty, while I'm playing my game." She pretends to play a game on a plastic phone, punching imaginary buttons. The mom then walked away, and the kitty continued the play scenario solo. She grabbed the phone and started pushing buttons. Noticing the researcher watching her, she came out of character to say, "I'm calling the cops on my mom," then went back to her play, talking on the phone to the cops. Playing house with food and dishes, dressing

up, playing moms and babies, and playing teenagers were also observed in the dramatic play areas of the three rooms.

In two of the classrooms, the researcher observed students playing school. In one room, three students used a miniature whiteboard easel, whiteboard pens, and an ABC book to play school. In another room, a group of students pulled out paper, markers, and colored pencils at a small table. "Let's do our homework," a girl said to the boy sitting beside her. "We're going to do our homework," he responded. "This is homework from my mom," another boy said as he colored over a school notice about important upcoming school events. "Yes, this is homework from my mom," a little girl at the end of the table repeated. "I did my homework assignment," one of the boys announced as he showed his paper to the group.

In another room, dramatic play was observed during Lego play. Three boys on the carpet were building with Legos while negotiating the rules for a game involving police officers and robbers. One boy said, "Two can be police. If you want to be police, raise your hand." The two stood and chased each other around the carpet with their Lego vehicle creations, then one lost interest and said, "Ok, now I want to build a robot," and sat back down by the Lego bin. The other was flying his airplane saying, "Quick! Grab your money as quick as you can. Get all your money." He made airplane noises and explosions as he flew his Legos through the air. The boys moved fluidly between building with Legos, telling and acting out the story, crashing into the carpet, flying back to the Lego bin, and building something new. "Oh no, there's 21 chasing after us!" one boy exclaimed, and all three boys jumped up, flew their Lego vehicles around the carpet area, and fell back to the ground.

In the three classrooms, the researcher observed students engaged in dramatic play with miniature figurines and toys, such as plastic animals, castles and knights, Barbie dolls, and

ponies. In one room, the small figurines and toys were in transparent plastic tubs for *Tub Toy Time* and pairs of students shared a tub during play time. Two boys on the carpet were playing out a birthday scene with tiny animal toys. One boy said to the other, "Remember, give her some milk! Cuz if you don't give it to her, she cries. See. Waa, Waa, Waa!" Two girls nearby on the carpet had plastic ponies. As they took each one out, they brushed the ponies' hair and then lined the ponies up on a bench. Once all the ponies were brushed and lined up, the two girls went down the line and named the ponies: "Buttercup, Buttercup, Butterfly, Cutie," one girl said to the other. Next, they grabbed ponies out of the line and started playing out a story of two ponies who were friends.

The instances of dramatic play observed by the researcher in the three classrooms suggests the role of language play within dramatic play scenarios, especially in the form of storytelling and negotiating roles with peers (Davison, 1998; Fein, 1981; Sachs, 1987). Dramatic play seems to occur within other forms of play, including small motor play, which is the third most common type of play observed by the researcher. While dramatic play sometimes occurred during small motor play scenarios, not all small motor play was necessarily dramatic play.

Small motor play in classrooms. Small motor or manipulative play was documented 31 times in researcher field notes of observations. Miller and Almon (2009) describe small motor play as playing with small toys and manipulatives, such as stringing beads, sorting objects, completing puzzles, and building Legos.

An extensive amount of small motor play observed in the three classrooms occurred during math centers. The researcher observed students building and manipulating with Polydrons, pattern blocks, Unifix cubes, and Geoboards during math. In one classroom, the students were stretching orange rubber bands on the yellow Geoboards to make snowflake

designs. Geoboards are plastic pegboards with short pegs every inch or so, on an 8x8 inch board. They are used for creating geometric designs with rubber bands. Other students were creating designs and scenes with colorful wooden pattern blocks: green triangles, orange squares, blue and white rhombuses, red trapezoids, and yellow hexagons. Four girls were seated at a table to build with pattern blocks. One girl explained to the girl seated beside her, "I made a boat." The second girl responded, "It's not a boat, it's a house," as she placed one white rhombus on the top of the structure. "Oh," the first girl responded, and continued adding pieces to her creation.

Lego building was a form of small motor play observed in all three classrooms during choice time. Airplanes, cars, and houses were built from large tubs of colorful Legos. During observations, the researcher primarily documented boys engaged in playing with Legos. In one of the classrooms, small motor play occurred after students' literacy jobs were finished. The teacher put out pom-pom balls and pinchers on a kidney table and Wikki Stix on the art table for students who completed work early. The pom-pom balls were various bright colors, and students were picking up the pom-poms with large plastic tweezers and separating them into piles based on color. At the art table, two girls took Wikki Stix to make letters in their names. Wikki Stix are a wax-coated yarn which are soft and pliable to twist, bend, and create. The Tub Toy Time in one of the classrooms also was classified as small motor play by the researcher, since the tubs contained small toys for play, from little animals to wooden puzzles to magnets. In another classroom, a tub of plastic sea creatures was brought out by three boys to play and make up stories. "The crab is getting away!" one exclaimed. "The swordfish moved, the crab is getting away!" another responded. While there was a little bit of storytelling documented, the boys mostly manipulated the small toys and arranged and re-arranged the sea creatures on the table, sorting them into groups by type of animal. In one room, playdough was brought out during

choice time. Students were rolling the playdough and forming cookies, offering them to the teacher. “Oh, what delicious cookies!” she responded as she co-played and supervised the table.

Analyzing the instances of small motor play documented in researcher field notes revealed that this type of play frequently accompanied other forms of play, such as dramatic play, language play, or construction play.

Types of play attribute summary. Data gathered through the survey, interviews, and observations indicates a high level of support by providing multiple types of play within the kindergarten classroom. Interview participants shared examples of language play, arts play, and dramatic play most frequently. During observations, language play, dramatic play, and small motor play were the types most frequently noted in field notes. In general, in the three classrooms students would often combine different types of play within the same play scenario. While the researcher coded field notes for individual play types being observed, in several instances a play scenario was coded for more than one type of play. The final attribute identified by the researcher relates to the teacher practices supporting play.

Research Question 5: Role of the teacher. The attribute on the role of the teacher, or teacher practices before, during, and after play, was designed to answer the research sub-question, “How do kindergarten teachers support play and learning through play?”

Survey. The final set of questions on the survey focused on the role of the teacher before, during, and after play experiences, and the teachers’ view of his or her primary role during play. The questions on the role of the teacher were based on the research by Grunlund (2010) and DeVries (2001), who define how teachers in playful learning environments support playful learning. Table 15 provides a summary of the survey responses from the 43 teachers who completed the questions on the role of the teacher.

Table 15

Survey Response Totals on Role of Teacher Before, During, and After Play

	Yes	No
Before play		
Providing space	42	1
Providing time	43	0
Providing materials	40	3
Delineating choices available	39	4
Asking children to choose or assigning children to activities	38	5
Developing rules for choice/play	36	7
During play		
Initiating play by making activity suggestions	37	6
Initiating play by making material suggestions	37	6
Providing suggestions to specific children about what to play	33	10
Responding to play by limiting or stopping play	32	11
Helping resolve conflict	42	1
Helping play proceed, setting limits, or answering questions	41	2
Inquiring or commenting on play	43	0
Being present, observing and accepting play	42	1
After play		
Talking about and discussing play with children	32	11
Allowing material to stay in place to continue play	23	20
Documenting play via photos, videos, or document displays	27	16
Planning the next play session with children	23	20

Note. Total Responses: 43

Before play, the most frequent activities reported by teachers included providing space, time, and materials. When asked, "How do you prepare before play in your classroom? (select all that apply)," 42 provide space (setting up centers, choice areas), 43 provide time (a set times in the day/week allocated to choice/play), 40 provide materials (open-ended materials, imaginative play props), 39 delineate choices available, 38 ask children to choose or assign children to activities, and 36 develop rules for choice/play. Five respondents indicated other preparation tasks, including teaching children to invite others to play and accepting or declining; having children get out the necessary materials to set up at start of choice time and clean it up at the end, only assisting as needed (such as getting more paints out); and incorporating child-initiated activities.

During play, the most frequent teacher reported activities included inquiring or commenting on play, helping resolve conflict, and being present to observe play. When asked, "How do you provide support during play in your classroom? (select all that apply)" 37 initiate play by making activity suggestions; 37 initiate play by making material suggestions; 33 provide suggestions to specific children about what to play; 32 respond to play by limiting or stopping play; 42 help resolve conflict; 41 help play proceed, set limits, or answer questions; 43 inquire or comment on play; and 43 are present to observe and accept play. Other supports reported by the teachers during play included documenting play, running a center, making use of family volunteers, and playing different games with the children.

After play activities by the teacher were the least frequent, as compared to before and during play. The most common after play activity reported was discussing and reflecting on play. When asked, "How do you provide support after play experiences? (select all that apply), 32 respondents talk about and discuss play with children; 23 allow materials to stay in place to continue play; 27 document play via photos, videos, or document displays; and 23 plan the next play session with children. Other after play support reported by teachers included inviting children to thank each other and reflect on experiences; reviewing materials expectations, specifically clean up; and sharing.

The final question on the role of the teacher asked, "When children are engaged in play/centers/choice time, what is your primary role?" Teachers were asked to rank their role from "1" being what they do most to "4" being what they do least in their role. Most respondents reported that their primary role was monitoring behavior and responding to conflict. Respondents indicated their primary or number one role as follows: 14 selected "I monitor behavior and discipline children if conflicts arise;" three selected "I instruct children in how to

do different activities and observe children that they are on task;" 13 selected "I observe children, direct tasks, manage materials, and help keep order during choice/center time;" and nine selected "I engage with children in play activities, wondering aloud and posing questions to promote reasoning." According to DeVries (2001), engaging with children in play activities indicates the highest level of support for play.

The role of the teacher as advocate for play with other stakeholders emerged within the comments section of the survey:

> I am lucky that my building principal believes that I am the professional who can and should decide what is best for my students in my classroom. I have had many comments from parents that they appreciate that I advocate for and make time for play in our daily routine.

Comments such as these allude to the role of the teacher going beyond the walls of the classroom as they advocate making time, and space, for play.

Interviews. Within the nine interview transcripts, 17 codes were assigned a total of 218 times on the attribute role of the teacher (see Table 16). The three codes that occurred with the greatest frequency during interviews were related to the structure and rules of play periods, play advocacy, and providing ample choices for play.

Table 16

Code Frequency in Interviews, Role of Teacher

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
RoT After (Clean Up)	0	RoT During (Responding to Ensure Safety)*	8
RoT After (Planning Next Session)*	1	RoT During (Inquiring, Commenting)*	11
RoT Before (Lesson Plans)*	1	RoT After (Discussing, Reflecting)*	13
RoT During (Initiating, Modeling)*	3	RoT During (Observing, Accepting)*	13
RoT During (Management, Other Tasks)	5	RoT During/After (Documenting Learning)*	14
RoT Before (Setting Up Environment)*	6	RoT Before (Setting a Purpose)*	17
RoT (General)	7	RoT Before (Providing Ample Choices)*	18
RoT Before (Goals)*	7	RoT (Advocacy)	30
RoT During (Co Playing)*	7	RoT Before/During (Structure and Rules)*	57

Note. *initial codes

Structures and rules help ensure safe and non-chaotic play. The role of the teacher in developing structures and rules before and during play was mentioned 57 times among the nine interviews. All the teachers interviewed spoke explicitly about their role in developing structures and rules to support a safe and non-chaotic play-time. The number of quotations coded for "structure and rules" was the second most frequent code utilized across all the interviews in all categories, second only to teaching philosophy. This suggests the importance with which the kindergarten teachers interviewed view their role as ensuring safe and productive play.

Many teachers spoke about the beginning of the year as a critical time to set up expectations and routines for play, as well as anytime new materials or spaces were introduced. One explained that the direct instruction in her classroom at the start of year is, "How do you hold a paintbrush? How do you clean up tempera paints? How do you put away the blocks? … Because if you want a play-based classroom, you have total freaking chaos a lot of the time."

Another shared that she starts the year with four or five options, such as blocks on the carpet, the house/kitchen area, the writing/art center, and painting at the easel, and "As they kind of get familiar with that routine, then we put out more things." A third teacher explained the importance of setting up clear structures and routines to start the year:

> I really want my kids to be as independent as they can be. So teaching them how to take care of our materials and how to get out what they need and cleaning up and organizing and how do we move, how do we make transitions and how do we go from the carpet and all those kinds of things that help make the play possible by putting all those procedures and routines in place so they know how to do all those things.

Some of the specific structures and routines mentioned by the teachers interviewed included capping the number of students allowed in a certain play area, introducing new materials and modeling how to use the materials one at a time, rotating who picks first for choice time, utilizing a planning or choosing board with visual representations of the number limits in each area, role-playing expected behaviors, cleaning up routines such as a five-minute warning and a clean-up cue or song, setting a voice level expectation for choice time, and reviewing expectations at the beginning of each play period.

Many teachers also mentioned that they included their students in co-creating the expectations and rules. One shared, "We talked about what would be a fair way to choose. And they really like having their names drawn out of something." Another teacher explained that while she sets number limits for each space, her students sometimes negotiate to increase the number, "I'll say, 'Well, do you think you can handle six?' And then, you know, I let them and they do … It's figuring out well can we or not, are you going to be able to make good choices." A third teacher shared that she did not initially set limits, but that her students decided they

needed limits in each area, saying "My kids this year decided that one way to manage the noise and chaos was to limit the number of people that could be at any center to four." The same teacher commented, "This group this last year also decided that we should have closed signs, so that the consequence of not cleaning up the area the day before is that it gets closed for the next choice time."

In addition to inviting children to co-create expectations for play time, a few teachers mentioned that their structure for choice time had to be adapted to the needs of the specific group or specific children. One veteran teacher who typically allowed fairly open choice shared that only once in 23 years of teaching, the particular class "was so chaotic and there was so much fighting, I had to really change how I managed that time. I had to make playful centers up and then I had to choose the groups and rotate them around." Another teacher shared a similar sentiment, explaining "Some years you have kids you can just say, 'Ok, kids. Go wherever you want, make good choices, and have some fun.' Other years you have to really structure that social play time."

The comments of the interviewed teachers emphasize the critical role of structures and rules in creating a safe and non-chaotic play time, as well as having the structures and rules be responsive to the needs of the group of children in the classroom. The evidence suggests that setting up clear expectations before play and monitoring that expectations are being followed during play are important roles for the teacher in a playful classroom. Another theme that emerged from the interview data on the role of the teacher is that of the play advocate.

The role of the teacher as play advocate is essential. In the interview, teachers were asked, "How do you think others, such as parents or teachers, view play?" In response to this question, an emerging theme was the role of the teacher as an advocate for play. One teacher

shared, “I think my role is definitely a protector of play.” Another commented, “I think there are lots of people who don’t really get how important it is, and I think it’s important to be a vocal advocate for play in our schools as we push all the academic stuff down more.” While most of the teachers interviewed shared that parents and administrators were generally supportive of their choice to integrate play in the classroom, they still were intentional in communicating their philosophy and choices to these two groups of stakeholders.

Teachers spoke of parent communication opportunities during open house and back to school night, as well as through class newsletters, blogs, and articles sent home about the value of play. One interviewee explained, “With parents, it’s about communicating what you do and the choices that are made and why you are making those kinds of choices … And what the kids learn from that.” Another shared that at back to school night, “I talk about … engaging their whole bodies, engaging their whole self, and giving them a chance to interact with whatever it is they’re doing so that they can make sense of it.” A third teacher said, “In kindergarten especially, so much of your job as a teacher is to manage the parents as well … And checking in with them and over-communicating with them.”

Several teachers also mentioned advocating for play with administrators. One said, “We take the time for it to make sense to an administrator that never taught kindergarten … [I]f you’ve never taught really young children, you don’t have experience with that and you have to be told and shown what the teacher means.” The same teacher commented, “Sometimes you just have to be a little bit of a rebel and tell your boss that this is a good idea and why and hope for the best.” Another teacher shared that she changed the name of her choice time from free play to social play, “to give it a more legitimate sort of title so that, those who come in and evaluate and watch and make rules concerning what we do, I could more easily justify it.”

Documenting play through blogs, newsletters, and visual displays in the classroom and hallway were mentioned within the context of advocacy. One teacher expressed, "I just have a wish it was valued more. I wish it wasn't such an uphill fight … [I]t's an uphill battle to convince people of the value of play in the classroom. And I wish that were not the case." The comments by interviewed teachers seem to suggest that taking the time to advocate for the importance of play results in greater support by parents and administrators and thus is an important role of the teacher.

Teachers support play by providing sufficient choices. On the topic of the role of the teacher, most of the teachers reflected on the role of providing sufficient choices to prevent fights and to ensure that children truly have many choices of materials and areas and ways to engage during play time. One teacher explained, "Every student, every person should have their invitation to play that makes sense to them. And that's the role of the materials in the classroom." Another teacher shared, "[T]here are probably three times the choices as kids. So, if I have 29 kids, there'll be about 70 options for them to play." A third teacher commented, "I have more than enough options … When I tell children they will have a choice, I want there to really be a choice."

On providing new materials for choice, one teacher shared "Sometimes because of something I'm excited to share or see what they do with. Sometimes because of some new piece of material that has come our way. Sometimes because of something some child has introduced." Setting up centers with interesting and engaging materials was mentioned as "having tools and games and supplies and things that are age appropriate. Having a nice balance of hands on things and paper or game activities. Just having a good balance of things." The

interview participants revealed some important ways that kindergarten teachers very intentionally create choice before play.

Observations. In six days of observational field notes, two days in each of the three classrooms, 16 codes related to role of the teacher were assigned a total of 167 times (see Table 17). Codes on the role of the teacher were classified based on whether the teacher practice occurred primarily before, during, or after the play experiences. The three highest frequency codes during observations on role of the teacher were: before/during (structure and rules), during (responding to ensure safety), and before (lesson plans). The data associated with these codes revealed important themes on the role of the teacher in a playful classroom.

Table 17

Code Frequency in Observations, Role of Teacher

Code	***Groundedness (Frequency)***	***Code***	***Groundedness (Frequency)***
RoT (Advocacy)	0	RoT Before (Setting Up Environment)*	6
RoT After (Planning Next Session)*	0	RoT Before (Setting a Purpose)*	7
RoT During (Co Playing)*	1	RoT (General)	8
RoT After (Discussing, Reflecting)*	3	RoT During (Observing, Accepting)*	8
RoT Before (Goals)*	3	RoT During (Initiating, Modeling)*	10
RoT Before (Providing Ample Choices)*	3	RoT During (Inquiring, Commenting)*	11
RoT During/After (Documenting Learning)*	3	RoT Before (Lesson Plans)*	15
RoT During (Management, Other Tasks)	4	RoT During (Responding to Ensure Safety)*	15
RoT After (Clean Up)	5	RoT Before/During (Structure and Rules)*	65

Note. *initial codes

Structure and rules ensure safe, non-chaotic play and learning. The role of the teacher in creating structure and rules for play occurred in the highest frequency during both interviews and observations. Within researcher field notes, teacher practices were observed 65 times related to

creating and enforcing structure and rules for safe, non-chaotic play and learning. Across the three classrooms, the teachers employed a variety of strategies and routines. While each classroom evidenced obvious structure in the routines related to work and play, the individual teachers varied in how they created and reinforced expectations.

In all three classrooms, the researcher observed that the teachers employed a "work first, then play" rule that was communicated to the students with countdown warnings prior to play periods. In one classroom, the students were working on writing immediately before free choice time. The teacher announced to the students, "You will not go to choice time till you have five-star writing." The five stars included name, date, a quick sketch, student writing, and teacher writing. When a few students start to chat and get off task, she reminded them, "We are working on writing. You can add more detail or you can start a new page, but we are going to keep writing and then we're going to share our writing." All students were successful in completing the writing task. In another classroom, students were doing literacy jobs before choice time and the teacher reminded students, "Choice time will be in 30 minutes. Jobs need to be done before choice time." In the third classroom, the teacher collected incomplete work in a "Work to Finish" basket, which was distributed to students at the start of choice time to complete before moving on to a play experience.

In two of the three classrooms, the teachers utilized number limits for different play areas or interest centers. In one room, the teacher posted number signs with a pictorial representation of the quantity of children allowed in that space during choice time. For example, the dramatic play area was limited to six students. Posted nearby was a poster with the numeral six and six small children. The number limits varied and were based on the size of the space as well as the materials available for use. In the other classroom that employed number limits for choice time

areas, the teacher posted smiley face cut outs either on the wall near the play area or directly on the basket or bin of materials. Near one small carpet area, three round smiley face cutouts were affixed to the side of an adjacent shelf to show that three kids could be in that area. On the large Lego bin, one smiley face cut out was taped to each of the four sides, showing that four children could be playing with the Legos at one time. In all three classrooms, the researcher observed that number limits were set during math centers to ensure even distribution among the various options. Two of the three classrooms used a choice board for math time, with students placing a name card in a pocket chart for their selected activity. One teacher chanted, "One, two, three, four, no more," as students were picking their math center and getting started. During math centers, the teachers were observed setting a timer and then allowing students to clean up and pick a new math center when the timer went off.

In addition to setting "work first, then play" rules and limits on the number of children in different areas of the room or engaged with certain materials, the researcher observed all three teachers utilizing timers or time limits for both work and play periods. The teachers frequently announced to the class the amount of time remaining to complete an activity. In one classroom, a visual "Time Timer" was displayed on the wall. "Eyes on the red clock," the teacher called to the students. They quiet and look up as she sets the timer for seven minutes. "Seven minutes for Tub Toy Time," she announced. When the timer went off, she announced, "When the red clock beeps, it's time to clean up." Combinations of verbal, visual, and auditory signals were used to communicate time limits throughout the day in the three classrooms.

Other structures and rules observed in the three classrooms were related to voice levels, how to use materials, and actions that would result in loss of choice time. One teacher turned off the lights when it got too loud during both work and play periods, while another rang chimes for

attention and quiet. The use of classical music for writing time in one room assisted in limiting talking. The researcher also observed the teachers enforcing rules about how to use materials. For example, one teacher required that plastic lids be placed underneath the bins when in use to prevent students from stepping on the lids. In the three classrooms, various actions would prevent or limit choice time options. In one, if students did not adequately clean up a play area or interest center the previous day, it would be closed for the next play session. In another, misbehavior resulted in two boys sitting out while the class picked choice activities. The teacher then went to speak to them privately about "red choices" (unsafe) and "green choices" (safe) before they could move on to choice time. In two of the three classrooms, finishing work limited choice time for some of the students. The role of the teacher in creating and enforcing clear structures and expectations for both work and play periods was strongly evidenced in observations. A related theme that emerged on the role of the teacher was responding to ensure safety during play.

Teachers respond to ensure safety during play. During play periods, it was observed that the kindergarten teachers ensured safety by pre-teaching expectations, problem-solving with students, correcting behaviors, and enforcing consequences.

The researcher witnessed one teacher pre-teaching positive expectations. Before play, the teacher called over a student who had been having some negative peer interactions. She prompted the young boy, "Who are we going to play with and what are we going to play?"

Problem solving with students was documented in all three classrooms. In one classroom, a student approached the teacher because another boy took a toy without asking. The teacher walked with the child over to the boy who took the toy and guided him in using his words. In another classroom, a group of kids on the carpet were raising their voices and the

teacher walked over and said, “I’m hearing some frustrated voices here.” She then guided the students in resolving their own conflict to work in the same space together by taking different sides of the carpet. In the third classroom, where number limits were not established for each play area, wild play erupted in the dramatic play corner on one visit. The teacher walked over and asked, “What’s going on here?” and then commenting on the large number of kids in the space, “Maybe with six kids here, that’s why we’re getting a little crazy.” She explained to the students that the miniature table and chairs in the space came from her grandmother’s house and she would hate for them to get damaged. Then she walked away. The girls in the dramatic play corner slowly calmed down, spread out to a neighboring space, and became engaged in a dramatic play scenario with small plates for feeding the baby dolls. The wild running around and yelling subsided.

Correcting behaviors to ensure safety was also observed in the three classrooms. As opposed to problem solving with students, these instances reflect problem solving for students. In one classroom, a little girl was asking two other girls to give her a small plastic animal toy. The teacher quickly intervened, saying “I’m not going to make them give it to you. I’m noticing you have lots of toys to play with.” The same teacher directed other students to clean up and pick a new choice time activity when they got wild and were not using the materials appropriately. In another classroom, the teacher had warned the class about too much talking and being off-task during writer’s workshop. Most students quieted their voices and returned to their writing. Two students who continued to talk loudly were directed by the teacher to move to a different table to make a better choice. In the third classroom, the researcher observed a little girl crying near the dramatic play area. When the teacher went to investigate, there were seven

children who wanted to play in the space and arguing over who was the last one. The little girl crying was apparently told by her peers, "You have to leave. You were the last person here."

Enforcing consequences for unsafe behavior occurred in one of the three classrooms. Two boys who had been fooling around on the carpet and pushing each other in line for the bathroom had their names written on the board. The teacher told them they would be losing choice time. When choice time began, the boys were sent to the kidney-shaped teacher table in the corner. Once the remaining students got started on their play activities, the teacher went back to talk to the boys, asking them "Is this going to be a problem again tomorrow?" Once settled, she allowed the boys to pick a choice time activity. In addition to ensuring safety during play, another common theme in observation field notes related to the role of the teacher was planning for play.

Planning for play and learning. The observations in three kindergarten classrooms revealed intentional planning for learning through play and playful activities. Such intentional planning was evidenced through observed literacy, math, inquiry, and art lessons, as well as periods of free play.

Researcher field notes on literacy and math activities in the three classrooms documented many playful lessons. In all three classrooms, the teacher read aloud was a tool for teaching specific content area objectives as well as modeling literate behaviors. In one classroom, a variety of bingo games on literacy skills such as beginning sounds and rhyming words were modeled for the class and then integrated into small group work. During writer's workshop, a lesson on stretching out words to write was observed in one classroom and using sound cards as a writing tool was observed in another. In math, the researcher observed the modeling and playing of counting games in all three classrooms. The games allowed children to practice the

math skills of counting to 10, reading numbers to 10, adding to 10, and comparing quantities of pennies (more/less) to 10.

Inquiry and art activities also revealed intentional planning by the teachers. In one of the classrooms, the teacher planned a special inquiry activity to introduce a new unit of study on working and playing together. To begin the lesson, the teacher explained, "Collaboration or a collaborative job means we are going to work together. We're going to try something and see how it goes, and maybe try again tomorrow." The students were then put into groups of three to draw a picture together. At the end of the lesson, the whole group came back together to share and reflect on what worked and what did not work for each team of three students. The lesson evidenced intentional planning for specific learning goals as small groups played with the collaborative drawing task. Planning for art activities was also observed in the three classrooms. In one room, tempera painting with apples and water color painting a hand-drawn picture of an apple basket were integrated into literacy centers as part of a unit on apple trees. In another classroom, students completed easel painting of pumpkins in October and trees in December. In the third, a special art project painting snowmen was first modeled by the teacher and then completed by the students.

While these activities in literacy, math, inquiry, and art suggest more teacher-directed or guided play experiences, the planning for free play was revealed by teachers providing the time, space, and materials to support the play. Free play periods were not accidental, but rather a planned time within the daily schedule. The space was also provided to support specific types of play with open-ended materials. As a follow-up to observations, the researcher asked the three teachers how they plan for learning through play. Two of the three teachers responded that most of their planning is in how they introduce each space and model how to play and use the

materials in that space. Two of the teachers were intentional in having at least one play area reflect a current unit of study, such as a science table or art activity option for play time. During free play periods, the social goals of working together, taking turns, sharing, and problem solving were most evident. The observations in the three classrooms suggest that kindergarten teachers may intentionally plan academic goals for guided play or playful activities, while considering the social goals predominantly for free play periods.

Role of teacher attribute summary. The survey, interview, and observation data revealed several important roles for the teacher in a playful kindergarten classroom. As reported in the survey and observed in the three classrooms, a critical role of the teacher during play is monitoring behavior and responding to conflict. Survey comments and interviews suggest the emerging theme of the teacher as play advocate is also an essential role in supporting play. In both interviews and observations, developing structures and rules to ensure safe, non-chaotic play and learning was the most common theme. The role of the teacher in providing ample choices and planning for play and learning were additional themes from the interviews and observations.

Data collection and results summary. The three phases of the research study—the online survey, one-on-one interviews, and in-class observations—provided extensive data for answering the primary research question, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" In this study, teacher perspectives supporting play included a teaching philosophy valuing play, a belief that play is how young children learn, and a view that a primary role of play is developing social-emotional skills. Support for play was also revealed by daily opportunities for self-directed, free choice play, while other non-play tasks occurring during play periods reduced such opportunities. The results of data collection confirm that a playful

kindergarten environment provides well-defined and organized areas for work and play, with access to open-ended, interesting play materials in ample quantities. Such defined play areas with engaging materials support many different types of play, which children often combine in their play scenarios. Finally, the data collected on support for play reveals the many roles of the teacher in a playful kindergarten classroom, including monitoring behavior and responding to conflict, developing structures and rules to ensure safe, non-chaotic play and learning, and acting as a play advocate to educate other stakeholders on the value of play. The research study data analyzed suggests that the five attributes of support for play identified by the researcher prior to data collection were, in fact, relevant to answering the primary research question of the study.

Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected on five attributes of support for play through three phases of this research study: the online survey, one-on-one interviews with nine kindergarten teachers, and classroom observations of three kindergarten teachers. Keeping with the research design of descriptive multiple case study, the researcher attempted to describe how each attribute of support for play was reported by participants through the survey and interviews or evidenced by participants through observations. While this chapter examined each of the five attributes of support for play independently, the next chapter presents portraitures of the three case study classrooms and attempts to draw conclusions and inferences from the research findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the support for play in public school kindergarten classrooms by describing how teacher perspectives, opportunities for play, the play environment, types of play, and teacher practices before, during, and after play can lend support to meaningful play experiences. This chapter presents and evaluates the results of the study. All names provided are pseudonyms to protect the identity of teacher participants and their students.

The first section presents a summary of the research results, followed by a discussion presenting the three case study portraitures as holistic models to describe support for play. While Chapter 4 provided a detailed analysis of the attributes by phase and kind, this chapter considers how the case study participants provide support for play by combining the identified attributes. A cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2014) identifies emergent themes across the three cases in relation to the literature to answer the research questions. Next, limitations of the study are considered. Finally, this chapter presents implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Results

This descriptive multiple case study explored the primary research question, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" The research sub-questions that assisted in answering the primary research question were:

- How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?
- What opportunities for play are provided in kindergarten classrooms?
- How does the classroom environment provide for play?
- What types of play are present in kindergarten classrooms?

- How do kindergarten teachers support play and learning through play?

Early childhood foundations (Bertram, 2012; Comenius, 1893; Manning, 2005; Mooney, 2013; Uzgalis, 2015) lend support for playful learning as best practice when teaching young children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Additionally, longitudinal play studies (Campbell et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), and empirical research on free play (Ginsburg et al., 2001; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006) and guided play (Fisher et al., 2013; Han et al., 2010) support the primary argument that young children learn best through play.

In this study, a descriptive multiple case study design was implemented and data was gathered through surveys, interviews, and observations. The researcher sought to describe how kindergarten teachers are supporting play and learning through play in public school classrooms. The findings of this research study suggest that despite pressures that could potentially limit play in kindergarten, some teachers are still making space in their classroom for play.

Discussion of the Results

The three case study participants—Marie, Wendy, and Sarah—contributed invaluable information in all phases of data collection. They exhibited strong support for play in their survey responses and in one-on-one interviews and welcomed the researcher into their classrooms to observe their teaching practice in action. This section presents each case study participant as a "portraiture of play" to share the story of how individual teachers are supporting play in the classroom. Names of teachers and students have been changed to protect the identity of participants.

Portraiture 1: Marie. Marie's kindergarten classroom is large, warm, and inviting. Soft turquoise walls are contrasted by black bold die cut phrases located above each bulletin board: We are Mathematicians. We are Writers. We are Artists. We are Readers. We are Scientists. We are Kindergarten Learners. We are Responsible. The room is colorful for a kindergarten classroom without feeling overwhelming. The walls are covered in children's work, predominantly ABCs and 123s at this time of the school year. Photographs of the classroom evidence a well-organized work and play environment, with kidney-shaped tables in the center for work time and play areas and interest centers lining the perimeter (see Appendix F).

Marie is sporting a royal blue school shirt, jeans, and a pair of comfort shoes primarily worn by teachers and nurses who spend the entire day on their feet. Her brunette hair is pulled back in a pony, revealing faint purple streaks. She is smiling as she welcomes students into the classroom. "Hello, pumpkin!" she exclaims as the first student walks in the door. Students are reminded to find their name in the sign-in book and trace the highlighter with a pencil, to turn in communication folders and field trip permission slips, and to get started with the morning work of tracing letters and counting quantities up to five. The teacher remains at the door, welcoming each student with a warm greeting and a compliment as they walk into the room. Once morning work and attendance are complete, Marie sings out "the more we get together…" and students immediately begin cleaning up at tables and moving to the carpet area for calendar. With all students seated cross-legged on the floor and facing the calendar on the math bulletin board, Marie quickly leads the students in observing the weather, predicting a dot-pattern on the monthly calendar, stating today's date, singing "Days of the Week" to "The Addams Family" (Mizzy, 1991, track 1) tune, and counting on a number line by 1s the number of days they have been in school. She reads a counting book about bugs, which starts with counting to 10 and then

flips halfway through to count back down to one as bugs fly away to go for a swim in a nearby pond. When the story concludes, Marie reminds her class that some of the students will be switching rooms for reading. Most are called to line up at the door and leave the room to work with other teachers for the morning reading block.

A few students from Marie's room remain with her, while a handful of other kindergarten, first, and second grade students enter the room. A total of 11 students are with Marie for reading, seated on the foam carpet squares meeting area as she reads aloud a portion of *Dinosaur A-Z* (Priddy, 2004) and leads students in brainstorming words of objects that start with the sound /s/ for an on-going ABC chart on the easel paper. Pictures of a salamander, snow, stars, and a smiley face are added around an uppercase and lowercase S on the chart. Marie introduces the new sound /t/ with *Tub Toy Time*, allowing one student at a time to pick a tub and invite a partner from another class to play. Marie explicitly guides students with the social skill of inviting a partner and then once students are engaged in play, moves around and compliments pairs for playing well together as new friends. Tub Toy materials include Barbie dolls, miniature animal and people figurines, and wooden puzzles. After 15 minutes of play-time, the timer goes off and students clean up for small reading groups.

Two additional teachers enter the room and the 11 students are divided into three small groups for reading instruction. A district-adopted intervention reading program with scripted lessons is implemented for 40 minutes focused on the letter M and sound /m/ with the three groups. At 10:30, the visiting students line up to return to their homerooms and Marie's students return for morning snack and recess. Marie's students bundle up in coats, grab snacks, and head out the back door of the classroom, which leads to a large playground structure nestled within the local city park. The children run and play freely in the crisp autumn air for 20 minutes, then

hustle back to the line at the call of Marie's whistle. As the children come into line, Marie sings a call and response, "Find your partner (find your partner), holding hands (holding hands), we are lining up now (we are lining up now)…" to the tune of the French nursery rhyme "Frère Jacques."

Returning to the classroom, students with the classroom job of table captain clear off the kidney tables and the educational assistant sets out different math center materials on the tables and carpet areas: Unifix cubes, Geoboards, Polydrons, pattern blocks, a bucket of plastic bugs, and a counting game with bugs are hands-on, game based manipulatives from the district-adopted math program. The students pick their math center, placing their name card in the corresponding pocket chart as Marie reminds them, "1, 2, 3, 4, no more!" to limit the number for each space. During the next 12 minutes, Marie moves from group to group, assists two students to resolve a conflict about sharing the same space, makes suggestions, provides guidance, redirects, and joins in to model how to play with the materials. On rolling chairs in the middle of the circular formation of kidney tables, both the assistant and Marie quickly move from group to group to be present, to model, to redirect, and to guide the play with the math materials in a meaningful way. One girl has pulled out the wooden hexagons from the pattern blocks and is using them to build a tall stack on the table. Marie rolls over to suggest, "Maybe you could use them to make a picture on the table?" and then begins to create her own design with the various pattern blocks on the table.

After 12 minutes, the timer goes off and many of the students clean up and pick a new spot for the second rotation. At the bucket of plastic bugs, two girls grab handfuls out of the bucket and one yells excitedly, "I got two spiders!" The assistant reminds them that they are supposed to be grabbing handfuls and then counting how many in a handful, which they do while

the assistant is present but then quickly go back to their own play once she moves on to another group. Pretending that the spider is biting all the other bugs, the second little girl exclaims, "Spider, spider, help us, get the bad guy!" A third girl joins in the play, attacking the "bad guy" bug with her own spider but dropping it from high in the air onto the table. The girls then dump the entire bucket onto the table, searching for all the spiders and commenting, "This looks weird, this looks scary!"

The timer goes off and again students clean up and pick a new math center for the third and final rotation. A girl in a Storm Troopers shirt has been on the carpet and building a long string of Unifix connecting cubes the entire math period, intently focused on her solitary play. Most of the cubes are now connected in blocks of the same color – a group of black cubes, then orange, then black, then light blue, and so on – stretching from one end of the carpet to the other. Marie has rolled over to the pattern blocks table and comments to the three girls working together, "This looks like a fun little city to live in!" A boy who was playing with the plastic bugs hears Marie's praise and quickly cleans up to join the girls at pattern blocks. The timer goes off during the final rotation; all the kids stop, get quiet, put two hands on their head, and look to Marie for direction. She reminds them of clean up expectations, claps twice, and says "Go." Materials are quickly cleaned up and returned to their spot on the math shelves while table captains return color-coded pencil baskets and crayons to the tables.

Students sit on the carpet by the calendar and take turns using the bathroom, getting water, and washing hands to prepare for lunch. Two boys who were pushing and hitting each other on the carpet and in line to use the bathroom are reminded of behavior expectations and have their names written on the whiteboard under a Smiley face. One is directed to take a break in the green bean bag chair in the Feelings Space. Marie stands at the door and sings out, "I am

waiting for my class, to be in two lines fast, I am waiting for my class, for my class," to the tune "If You're Happy and You Know It," (Raposo, 1971) and the children quickly get in line. Marie calls out and students respond, "Eyes looking forward, hands in our partner's, voices off," before walking into the hallway. When the students return from lunch, they walk in silently and sit on the foam carpet area to pick a space for quiet time. The lights are off, an essential oil diffuser is emitting lavender and rosemary scents, and meditative music is playing on Marie's laptop. During quiet time, the children sprawl out on woven rugs, look at books, and cuddle with soft stuffed animal friends. One girl in a pink sparkly sweater, skinny jeans, and tan cowboy boots is in the Feelings Space bean bag chair, completely transfixed by a twisty fidget toy in her hands. After 15 minutes of quiet time, Marie turns off the music and sings to call students back to the carpet. They put away their rest time rugs and stuffed animals, returning to the foam carpet area calmly and looking expectantly toward Marie.

Standing in front of the students, Marie introduces an alphabet sound card as a tool writers use to help them sound out words. One student calls out, "Is it writer's workshop today?" And when Marie responds in the affirmative, all the kids cheer. Marie reminds the students, "How do you show me you're excited without making noise?" The students hold their hands in the air and wiggle their fingers for a silent cheer. Marie goes on to model Five Star Writing: Star 1 – Name; Star 2 – Date; Star 3 – Quick Sketch; Star 4 – Kid Writing; Star 4 – Color. When she gets to star 4 in her modeling, she spins in a circle, sinks down to her knees, and takes on the kid-persona of "Little Marie," sounding out words and using the new tool, the sound card, to assist her. The students help "Little Marie" by calling out the letters as she writes, "I wt tcs.". She then spins a circle, stands upright, and asks, "Did Little Marie come for a visit?" After kid writing, she explains she will add teacher writing, "I want tacos." When model writing

is completed, Marie reminds students they will not go to *Smiley Centers* – her take on free choice time – until they have 5 Star Writing in their writing journals. The students get sound cards and writing journals set up at their tables before heading out for PE. When they return from PE, the children sit down and get started with writing. Marie has turned on Beethoven as their background music for writing, stopping to remind students a few times, "I can't hear my writing music, that means it's too loud." One boy with dark hair in a Ramones shirt asks, "What do we draw?" Marie responds, "Oh honey, you have to decide what to draw. You can close your eyes and think." She offers support to a few students, but most are quickly and quietly engaged in their own writing – looking around the room for ideas, copying the date from the white board, and finding sight words to use in their writing. Marie sits down beside one boy and says, "Tell me about your picture. I can't wait to see your kid writing." As another student calls out, "I need teacher writing," Marie responds gently, "Raise your hand. I'm going to do a walk around, but there's only one of me so you might need to wait and be patient." She quickly makes her way around the circle of writers, adding teacher writing and praising their early writing efforts. Marie helps one boy with sounding out words and using the alphabet sound card to write his story, "The giant alligator terrorizes the city." Marie responds with excitement, "Oh, wow! You're such a good writer. Do you want to teach the writing lesson tomorrow?"

After 20 minutes of writing, the timer goes off and the students put their hands on their heads. Marie directs them to clean up and come to the carpet to share their writing. Holding a jar of popsicle sticks with the students' names written on each one, Marie pulls a "Stick of Opportunity" and allows students the opportunity to share their story, responding with "Yes please," or "No thank you" as she calls out each name. Five students get a chance to share, then writing journals are collected in a tub and taken to the writing center. Students sit on the carpet

and are ready to begin Smiley Centers. The two boys who were pushing each other before lunch are sent to a table in the corner of the room to think about "red choices" and "green choices" and wait to talk to the teacher.

Before play, Marie reminds the students they are practicing the skill of inviting a friend to play. If invited, students may respond "Yes please" or "No thank you," but each child who has their name drawn to pick a play center must invite a friend. The first boy who has his name called picks a tub of playdough and then invites a little girl by asking, "Would you like to play with me?" She responds, "No, thank you." He asks a second girl who says, "I'd really love to play with you, but let's play pets." "Okay," he agrees, and they switch out materials and head to the carpet area across the room to play together. The remaining students continue to pair up for Smiley Centers.

Around the room, children are "playing school" with a miniature whiteboard easel and markers, playing with Barbie dolls, rolling playdough into balls and pressing cookie cutters into the dough to make "cookies," building with Legos, and role-playing a kitty and mom scene in the dramatic play corner. The teacher speaks to the two boys who were sent to the corner table about behavior expectations and then asks, "Is this going to be a problem again tomorrow?" They say no, and she directs them to choose two different Smiley Centers for today. They quickly join their peers at play.

On the foam mats, three boys are building airplanes with Legos and zooming them around. One boy stands and asks, "Do you like my plane?" and a second quickly responds, "Yes. Do you like my plane?" The first boy nods and they begin play negotiations on a game involving police officers and robbers. They take turns making rules for the game about how many can be police and how many can be robbers. One eventually loses interest and says,

"Okay, now I want to build a robot." Another boy is still flying his airplane through the air making airplane noises and explosions and yelling, "Quick! Grab your money as quick as you can. Get all your money." The boys move fluidly between playing out a scenario with the Lego creations, crashing, returning to the Lego bin, rebuilding, and then adding or changing their story back in the play scenario. After fifteen minutes, Marie rings chimes and gives students the option to clean up and move to a new play area. She claps twice and says, "Go."

In the dramatic play kitchen area, two girls are engaged in a play scenario. One is the kitty that is making a mess with all the pots and pans and plastic food on the floor. She comes out of character to say, "Now you're mad at me, and I have to clean it all up," to the mom character who is sitting in the chair. The mom tells the bad kitty, "Go to your box or I'll call the cops. Now you're going to watch, kitty, while I play my game." The mom pushes buttons on the plastic phone for a while and then just walks away. The kitty continues now as a solo play scenario, taking the phone and pushing buttons. Noticing the researcher is watching her, the kitty explains, "I'm calling the cops on my mom," and returns to talking on the plastic phone.

On the carpet area, two kids are playing school with the miniature whiteboard easel, markers, and an ABC book. A third child asks the teacher if she can join them, and Marie points to the three smiley faces posted by the materials. "Three smiles, three kids," she responds. The boy writing on the miniature easel stops and says to the researcher, "I like your shirt. Red is my favorite color." The researcher responded, "I like red too. It's one of my favorite colors." "It's my first favorite," he shared, and then he returned to drawing and writing on the whiteboard.

At the science table, a girl in a black and white striped shirt with a large glittery sequin heart and jeans is using a large magnifying glass on a tripod to look at her hand. A nature box on the table contains twigs, leaves, acorns, and a fresh picked sunflower. After inspecting her hand,

the girl picks up a hand held magnifying glass, holds it up to her eye, and begins walking around the room.

At one of the kidney shaped tables, students are playing with scented playdough the teacher made. The blue smells of peppermint and the orange of sweet orange essential oil. After using the playdough as morning work for several days at the start of the year, it was added to Smiley Centers to provide a sensory play experience. The students are rolling and cutting out cookies, and Marie asks, "Are these snickerdoodles? I love snickerdoodles!" She pretends to eat the play dough cookie and the children giggle. Two boys on the carpet are getting loud and Marie asks, "Boys, are you making green choices with Littlest Pet Shop?" And they settle and respond with a yes. "Oh yeah, I'm glad you're making green choices," Marie says and returns to playdough play with the girls.

One boy is lying on the floor, building with a wooden train set and then running the train along the tracks in front of him. He stops for a while, watching two girls nearby who are building with large wooden blocks, then quietly returns to his own story and inspecting the train track.

Forty minutes after Smiley Centers have started, Marie rings the chimes, puts her hands on her head, the kids mimic by putting their hands on their heads and look to Marie for direction. "Kindergarten children, it's time to clean up. Miss R (the assistant) and I are going to walk around and we're looking for two magic items and two quiet cleaners. To be a quiet cleaner, you have to be focused on cleaning and not talking." Marie claps twice, says "Go," and the kids get started with clean up. Once cleaning is finished, Marie directs the students to get their backpacks and papers from their mailboxes and return to the foam square carpet area. A treasure box is opened and prizes are given out for students who picked up the magic items and who were

today's quiet cleaners. Marie reminds students how they can earn the quiet cleaner and magic item prizes tomorrow, and then directs the class to carry backpacks to the carpet area in the front of the room for dismissal. While waiting for parents to arrive, Marie allows students to pick songs for them to sing together. They sing two songs together, one about frogs and one about dogs, and then parents begin to arrive at the door. Marie reminds the students to return signed field trip permission slips, then stands at the door and calls students' names, asking "Would you like a hug, handshake, or high five?" as each child leaves the classroom. Once all students have been picked up, Marie tidies up and begins preparing materials for the next day's lessons.

The in-person interview with Marie provided insight into how she views play and its relation to learning within the kindergarten classroom. Marie expressed a philosophy supportive of play and a belief that play is learning, with an emphasis on social emotional skill development. She also discussed the unique role of the kindergarten teacher as play advocate. Marie's philosophy is that play is essential in kindergarten. She explained:

> Two things that have always influenced me and my absolute drive to put in as many recesses and play as I can are the high, high amounts of ADHD and ADD diagnosed in little kids. The second piece that has pushed and focused me is that a lot of children do not know how to make friends and be friends.

Marie expressed a student-centered philosophy saying, "I think that kids have to desire to play regardless if we schedule that out of them, kids have a desire to play … they like to play in their world. They just do. So, we do." Marie's philosophy is built upon a belief in developmentally appropriate practice: "They're so young that they have to have time to process in different ways, and they can't sit for that long and they can't attend for that long. Their bodies and brains just do not know how."

She expressed the view that play is how young children learn, saying "Play is a way that they can kind of make sense of their limited exposure to the world," and "They make all these things fit and trying to make sense of all of the things they see every day … when they're playing." She provided this example: "They'll pull out the puppets and they'll play through a fight or they'll play through weird things that they'll see and then it will make sense in their puppet show." Marie asserted, "I don't have to teach everything, all the time, they can play and acquire knowledge," and "I think play is how kids process everything they are learning." Regarding the relationship between play and academic standards, she said, "I see play as a constant struggle to fit into standards because standards aren't written with play in mind," but "How me, as a teacher, sees play is application of things kids have learned. So I think that it fits into standards as proof that they've learned it."

While Marie saw play as supporting academic learning goals, she primarily believes in the power of play to support social-emotional learning. She shared, "We spend a lot of our day identifying emotions, problem solving, and (practicing) how to play with each other. How to be a friend and how to be a student." As evidenced by the observations, one way Marie supports students in playing together and being friends at the beginning of the year is learning how to invite a friend to play and how to respond to an invitation politely: "I'll pull sticks and I teach them how to invite somebody else to go with them to the center. So they learn 'yes please' and 'no thank you, maybe next time' or things like that." Marie also shared that during play times, she helps students to resolve conflicts by providing brief small group or partner social-emotional skill lessons as needed:

> You want to reduce your behavior problems, so we're going to put all our social and emotional lessons that would have been done with kids sitting around you for twenty

> minutes looking at a picture, (asking) "What do you think they're feeling right now?" Not as effective as sitting with three or four kids on the floor going, "Oh my gosh, you and Timmy were just fighting. Look at his face, how does he feel right now? Timmy, what's going on in your body? Okay, everybody make that face. That's an unhappy face. Now let's make happy faces. Let's see if we can get his face happy."

Similarly, Marie shared that Smiley Centers provides her the opportunity to interact with "the child nobody wants to play with or the child that is struggling with taking turns, or identifying why somebody is upset with them. I can help them figure that out during that time." She asserted throughout the interview, "My number one focus with this time is the social and emotional development of kids."

With a strong belief in the value of play, Marie shared that her role in supporting play went beyond the walls of the classroom as an advocate for play: "Sometimes you just have to be a little bit of a rebel and tell your boss that this is a good idea and why and hope for the best." She explained that her kindergarten-teaching partner has a similar philosophy towards play, which made creating space for play and advocating for the time within the daily or weekly schedule a bit easier:

> We can go to our boss and say, these are all of the things we're going to achieve in these minutes, and these minutes are left … Here's what we're going to put there and this is why we're going to put it there, because they're five. And they need to play with each other and they need to play by themselves and they need to work as groups and partners and here's why.

Marie explained that her kindergarten team had changed the schedule and program to make space for play and successfully advocated with the building administrator, "because he's willing

to listen and come and see what we're doing and our numbers and our results speak for themselves," and "We take the time for it to make sense to an administrator that never taught kindergarten." While she views the existing instructional program as not an ideal match to the needs of kindergarten learners, she shared "We have flexibility from our principal. So, we are able to take the required minutes and expectations and present them in ways we see fit." As a play advocate, Marie primarily discussed her role towards advocacy with building administrators.

Portraiture 1 summary. In the interview, Marie expressed support for play through a well-articulated philosophy with a view towards play as meaningful learning and shared her role a play advocate. During observations, Marie demonstrated support for play through a well-organized play environment, the availability of open-ended play materials, providing opportunities for free and guided play, and creating and enforcing structures and rules to ensure student safety during play.

Portraiture 2: Wendy. Walking into Wendy's kindergarten classroom, a visitor's eyes are first drawn to the fish tank sitting on a small desk just inside the door and then up to a clothesline strung across the length of the room with 23 artfully decorated cardboard children. Complete with yarn hair, feathers, fabric, and crayon drawn faces, each of these little cutouts was created by Wendy's kindergarten children. Behind the children's art, an entire wall of windows runs the length of the room above the shelves, letting in abundant natural light. The remaining three walls contain multiple bulletin boards, a mix of student work and displays to support learning. Child-decorated cutouts of cardstock children, a miniature version of those on the clothesline spanning the room, are on a board labeled "A Circle of Friendship in Kindergarten." On a board labeled "My Personal Best Effort" each child has a 9x12 inch black construction

paper with their name above it. A variety of student work is on display, marked with a special "Personal Best Effort" stamp. Additional bulletin boards include the class calendar, a word wall, and a writing tree. Six round tables are in the center of the room, tagged as orange square, red trapezoid, green triangle, purple rectangle, blue diamond, and yellow hexagon. Wendy explains that she gives each table a shape name to reinforce learning the names of the shapes, a kindergarten math learning objective. Photographs of the classroom evidence an organized work and play environment, with round tables in the center for work time and play areas and interest centers around the perimeter of the room (see Appendix G). These include a large dramatic play corner, art-writing center, art corner, listening center, and break zone area for managing emotions.

Wendy is dressed in black knee-high boots, a grey sweater dress, and long black cardigan. Wearing stylish glasses, her blonde and auburn highlighted hair is twisted back into a clip. At 8:00 a.m., the first bell rings and Wendy walks down the hall to retrieve her class from the cafeteria. As students enter, they hang up backpacks and coats, turn in papers, and then pick up a laminated sentence strip containing their name that is set out on one kidney-shaped table. They walk over to another table to write their name on a large poster to sign-in for the day. After writing their name, students place the sentence strip into a basket on the table and find a book to read. Once most students have arrived, Wendy calls the students to the carpet for morning message, which introduces the number five. She gives each student a half sheet to trace and write the number five and they return to tables. When finished, number five papers go into cubbies and each student grabs a book for "book look" on the carpet.

Wendy sings out for the children to come to the carpet, books are quickly stashed away, and students come to their assigned colored square on the large carpet. Wendy says, "Hands on

head if you're ready for work places," and voices are off and all children have both hands on top of their heads. Wendy calls one child's name at a time to pick a math center and then places the name card into a blue pocket chart showing the different options: Polydrons, pattern blocks, a bug race game, Unifix cubes, bucket of bugs, and Geoboards. After making a choice, the materials are retrieved from the math shelf and taken to their assigned table. The tub containing Polydrons is labeled with the orange square and goes to the orange square table, and so on.

There is a fair amount of friendly chatter as students begin math centers, but it quiets down as students become more engaged with their selected play materials. Three boys and one girl are building with Polydrons, each intensely focused on their own project. Two boys are interlocking a large panel of square Polydrons to create a box-like structure. A boy in a gray hooded sweatshirt has several triangle Polydrons connected as he begins his structure, holding it in his lap with his tongue out as he attempts to fit the pieces together. At the pattern block table, two girls and two boys appear focused on their own projects as well. A boy in a navy and orange striped shirt has built an army base with his "two strongest weapons" and is making zipping noises. A little girl in a pink flowered sweater has set up a city with a wall made of yellow hexagons. Multiple structures are built inside the wall, including red trapezoid houses. "It's a box car town," she tells the researcher, and returns to her building. The other two students are quietly creating geometric designs flat on the table with the pattern blocks.

Wendy is at the bucket of bugs table, where she has guided the students in placing the bugs on ten-frame counting mats. Wendy has a laser pointer and is leading four children in counting the bugs one-by-one to see how many there are altogether. Beside her is a clipboard with a class list labeled "Math" in order to track which kids have played the new bug race game, ensuring all kids have an opportunity to play at least once. Wendy shares with the researcher

that on some math days, she adds two self-created work places as options: one for creating shapes and numbers with playdough and another water color painting the shapes. After 20 minutes of math centers, Wendy turns off the lights, says "Math freeze, hands on head," and gives instructions for clean up. During clean up from math, a girl in a long blue dress approaches the researcher to ask what she is doing. When the researcher tells the girl she is taking notes of what she sees in the classroom, the girl responds, "I want to be a singer when I grow up. And a momma," and then continues with her cleaning tasks. Math tubs return to the math shelves with their corresponding color and shape labels, and then all students move quickly to the carpet area.

Wendy reads *Mouse Count* by Ellen Stoll Walsh (1991) about a hungry snake that is collecting mice in a jar. She invites students to count with her the number of mice in the jar on each page, then stops and asks, "Does anyone know what the word is for wanting more and more?" and introduces the word greedy. During the story, Wendy periodically stops to ask the students to make predictions. After read aloud, Wendy pulls a popsicle stick from a jar and makes the /m/ sound to hint at the beginning sound of the student's name. Students shout out, "Mary," and Mary is called forward to be the Calendar Helper, pointing to each card in the October calendar as the class counts with her. The card for today is turned over, revealing three red dots and three blue dots. Wendy grabs word cards with more, less, and equal and tells Mary to say "stop" when she points to a word card that fits today's comparison. When Wendy points at "equal" Mary says "stop" and Wendy praises her for knowing that three blue and three red shows equal numbers. Mary sits and Wendy pulls a second popsicle stick, making the /b/ sound. The students call out "Brian, Brian, Brian!" and Brian stands up to be the next helper. He leads

the class in counting paper links to show how many days they have been in kindergarten. A total of 25 links are connected in colored groups of ten, showing it is the 25th day of school.

Wendy shares with the class that there are two important changes in today's schedule happening after morning recess: a guest presentation and a bus safety drill. Students get their coats and line up at the back door that leads directly outside to a playground area. Wendy grabs a large box of Goldfish crackers and leads the class outside. Students line up for a handful of crackers, then play for about fifteen minutes before Wendy blows the whistle to line up. Some kids play on a structure, a group of boys plays soccer, and others run around playing a tag game. After morning recess, students grab a quick drink from water bottles and then sit on the carpet for today's special presentation, "Talk About Trees." A nature table in the room has several books, specimens (leaves, twigs, pine cones), and other artifacts that correspond with this unit of study about trees. Wendy explains to the researcher that the presentation is happening when the class would normally have Writer's Workshop. Following the 25-minute presentation in which students are shown different types of leaves and cones that come from several types of trees, the students are directed to get their coats back on and line up for the bus safety drill.

With line leaders in front, the class hustles down the long hallways from their classroom in the far back corner of the school out the front doors and out the road, where the bus is waiting. All other classes have already completed the safety drill today, and the bus driver smiles when Wendy's class finally arrives. The bus safety drill is quick; afterward, Wendy leads the class in their quasi-straight line back into the building and down the other long hallway to the library. She drops the children off for their weekly library session and then explains they go directly from library to lunch and recess, which means she is free for about an hour until she picks up the students from lunch recess.

After lunch recess, Wendy leads the students into the room to stash coats and lunch boxes, drink water, and sit on the carpet. Wendy has a child-sized shopping cart filled with library books at the front of the carpet area, which she holds up one at a time. As students recognize the library book they checked out before lunch, they stand up, grab the book from Wendy, and go to their backpacks to put the book inside to take home. Kids are quiet and calm on the carpet, waiting for their book to be retrieved from the shopping cart. A conflict arises between a boy and girl over at the backpacks, and the girl tells Wendy that the boy was bossing her around. After a quiet side conversation between the little girl and Wendy, she walks over to the boy to say, "Please don't do that. I don't like it." Wendy returns to distributing library books, and when the cart is empty the library helper pushes the shopping cart over to the dramatic play area.

Seated in front of the students, Wendy directs the children's attention to a big book, *Julius* by Angela Johnson (1998), which is on the easel stand beside her. A student with the teacher helper job is standing on the other side of the book to help Wendy turn pages as she reads the story aloud. She reminds the students that this is day three of reading the story, and stops at vocabulary words within the story to ask for their meaning: "What is a crate? Everyone put it in your bubble, think, what is a crate? And release." And the kids call out, "a big box." At each vocabulary word, Wendy directs student to think about the meaning, put it in their bubble (hold it quietly in their mouths), and then release (everyone calls out at once the taught definition). The read aloud is quick paced and students remain engaged, despite it being the third day of repeated readings of the story. Wendy then asks the class to stand as they recite the corresponding poem that reinforces the highlighted vocabulary words in *Julius*. The story, vocabulary words, and poem with audio CD version are all components of the district-adopted literacy program. When

the poem begins, one boy is crawling around on the carpet and Wendy gently asks him to stand. When he does not respond, she says, "Okay, I guess we'll talk about it at choice," and he quickly stands up to join his classmates.

After reciting the poem twice as a class, the students sit and Wendy previews their literacy jobs for today: a bingo game to play with table groups, a grammar page (I like to _____ with _____.), and highlighting sight words (i.e. the, I, my). For each job, she describes, models, and then engages the students in practicing for the task before being asked to complete it independently. For the grammar page, she asks, "What do you think is a verb?" and one student responds, "a person, place, or thing." Wendy responds, "I'm glad you remembered a noun. I'm going to teach you a new thing, a verb. What is a verb?" And a student calls out, "action." Wendy then models sitting, standing, walking, reading, sleeping, and running using motions, then writes some action words on the easel paper: run, walk, draw, and sing. She explains that an action word goes in the first blank and a friend's name goes in the second blank on the page, then directs students, "Put your hand on your head if you know what action you will write," then, "Put your hand on your shoulder if you're not sure." Wendy then tells students to turn and talk to a partner to share their action word and friend's name. After a minute of sharing, Wendy calls the students back and asks a few students to share the sentence they plan to write. For the next job, Wendy explains to the students that they will be sight word detectives and go hunting for the words *I*, *the*, and *my* in a poem. Each word will be highlighted in a different color. This appears to be a job students have completed before, since the explanation is brief and students all nod their head in understanding.

Wendy then dismisses a helper from each table to retrieve the literacy table tub (all color-coded to correspond to the color shapes on the tables) and take it to the assigned table. In each

tub are grammar sheets, poem books for each student, a bingo game, highlighters, pencils, and a few leveled readers for students to read if they finish their jobs early. Wendy explains that table groups are mixed ability, and that she offers individualized support to students as they are working through their jobs. Each table group starts with the bingo game, which are different versions focused on kindergarten skills: rhyming, colors/shapes, alphabet, numbers, initial consonant, and picture words. Wendy explains that each table gets each bingo game one day, and then she rotates the games. After about ten minutes of bingo, Wendy turns off the lights, says "Bingo freeze, hands on head," and directs students to clean up and move on to their other literacy jobs. Wendy reminds the students that choice time will begin in 30 minutes, and literacy jobs must be finished before they can do choice time.

The bingo boards and markers are cleaned up and returned to the boxes, and students begin the grammar page and sight word hunt in the poem journal. Wendy squats down beside one little girl who is still working on sounds and letters and directs her to find and highlight the letter "M" in her poem instead of the sight words. Some of the higher ability students are tasked with locating the vocabulary words in the poem, in addition to the sight words. The poem book appears to contain a poem a week to coincide with the adopted literacy program's story of the week. Wendy walks around among the tables, offering to help students in sounding out words for the grammar page. Two girls have returned to the carpet with their poem books and highlighters, looking at the vocabulary word chart and then hunting for the words in the poem. Wendy continues to move from table to table to offer help, redirect off-task behavior, and remind students that their work goes back into the tub when they are done.

Giving the students a 5-minute warning, Wendy calls out, "I'm looking around to see who is going to be ready for choice when it's time for choice." One boy is crawling on top of the

table and is sent to stand in the hallway by Wendy as she says kindly, “Oh honey. Your body is not ready to be in my room.” Wendy turns off a light as she steps into the hallway to have a one-on-one conversation with the child, then returns to the room, turns off both lights, and directs students to use quiet, whisper voices as they finish up their jobs. Students bring their work to Wendy for it to be checked as complete and correct before they can grab papers from cubbies; pack backpacks; bring bags, coats and lunches to middle tables; and then choose a choice time activity. Students crowd around Wendy who is seated on a rolling chair at one of the students’ tables, anxiously waiting for their work to be checked and move on to choice time.

In the dramatic play area, five girls are beginning to pull out plastic dishes and dollhouse furniture and baby dolls and dress up clothes. Four boys have taken down a large plastic castle and placed it on a nearby table. With the castle is a basket of miniature figurines of knights, kings, horses, and dragons for small world play. Four girls and a boy are taking out paper, sticker, and scissors at the writing-art center. Three boys are on the carpet with a Lego tub and a large plastic toy airplane. At the art easel, two girls are each painting a giant pumpkin with tempera paint. The pumpkins have been pre-cut for the students to paint, and orange and green tempera paint are set out in cups with paintbrushes at the easel. All play materials are in baskets or bins with picture labels and names of what is inside, accessible to the children. Signs in each play area display the number limit for that space, such as five stars in the dramatic play area means five kids allowed in that space.

On the carpet area, the Lego play is evolving. Two more boys have joined the three boys who started on the carpet. One boy is saying, “I’m going to make a jail mission, I need pieces,” as he sits and sings to himself and tells a story. Two boys have the large plastic airplane and are trying to attach some Lego pieces to the airplane to extend the wings. Holding a Lego piece in

his hand, one says, “I know, it can be the cockpit. No, it can be luggage,” and then attempts to put the Lego piece inside the airplane’s door. The fourth boy who has joined them is digging through the large Lego basket, searching for pieces to build a car. The fifth boy has been putting on costumes and comes to the carpet dressed as a firefighter. He tries to grab the airplane, one of the boys holding it says “no,” and he responds, “I’m just going to do this,” showing the other two how to take off the top of the airplane.

After 20 minutes of choice time, there are four students still working on literacy jobs at the tables. Wendy remains seated near the children who are finishing up literacy tasks to check work and assist if necessary. One boy walks over to tell Wendy another boy took a toy without asking. She walks over to help them problem solve and use their words. A little girl in thick glasses, long sandy blonde hair, and a blue dress has set up a kid-sized keyboard on two small chairs and is seated on the floor, practicing playing the piano. After about 30 minutes of choice time, Wendy turns off the lights, sings “It’s time to clean up, clean up, clean up, and meet me at the center tables.” Students clean up their play materials, returning all pieces and parts to designated tubs and baskets, and two minutes later Wendy counts backwards from ten to one. When she gets to one, all students are seated at tables with their heads down. “Heads down, voices off,” she sings. Then asks, “Who is my room checker?” One girl walks to each play area to check that it is cleaned up, and the house and kitchen area has food left out. The girls who played there jump up from their seats, go to finish cleaning up, and then return quietly to put heads back down. Wendy dismisses students by table who are quiet to line up for afternoon recess.

The class spends 20 minutes outside for their third recess of the day, then come back in the room, grab their backpacks, put the chairs up, and sit on the carpet. The teacher helper is

taking the basket of laminated name cards and laying them out on the kidney table to prepare for the next morning while Wendy sits with the students and pulls out another popsicle stick from the name jar saying, "This person's name starts with E." Evan is sent to check the weather by looking out the window and then reporting back to add to the on-going daily weather tracker. He returns to the carpet after peeking outside and says, "All cloudy, and cold." Wendy responds, "But can we see cold? We are reporting the weather by what we can see." Evan says cloudy. Wendy draws another popsicle stick from the jar, saying "This is another friend that starts with a vowel. This friend's name starts with I." Iris comes to the calendar to lead the class in counting the number of days in school shown on a laminated 10-frame chart. With calendar tasks complete, Wendy reads aloud *Press Here* by Herve Tullet (2011). The book is an interactive text that asks the reader to follow directions, press buttons on the page, move the book, and turn it upside down, all which move the colorful buttons in different ways through the pages of the book. It is a playful book and Wendy takes her role of direction-follower seriously as the kids giggle and gasp and make predictions about what will happen next.

Following the story, Wendy refers to her class list on after school routines, dismissing three students to line up at the interior door for the school bus; one to line up for art; and five to line up for after school care. The remaining students are called by color row on the carpet to line up at the exterior door for parent pick up. Walking the group for parent pick up out the back door, Wendy leads the students to a nearby gate in the school yard fence where a mass of parents stand and wait patiently. Students remain in a line, and Wendy asks each consecutive child at the front of the line to point to mom, dad, auntie, or whoever is picking them up, Wendy looks up, finds the parent, gives a little wave, and then releases the child. Once all children are dismissed, Wendy returns to the classroom and begins preparations for the next day's activities.

During the interview, Wendy shared how she views play and its relation to learning within the kindergarten classroom. She expressed a philosophy supportive of play, a belief that children learn and practice valuable skills during play, and she emphasized the value of student choice in play. Wendy discussed a student-centered philosophy saying, "My first focus is my students, of course. And every year it's different … I base my instructions on my students, on what they need." She shared a belief in developmentally appropriate practice, reflecting:

> I think the rigor is too unrealistic for 5- and 6-year-olds. I teach, I'm very developmental with their needs and so (it) depends upon if they're learning to write their name or if they're reading chapter books, you know I gear my teaching, the skills they need are based on their development. I would definitely have much more play, much more free time, if it weren't for CCSS [Common Core State Standards].

Expressing a concern about students who are below benchmark and may not meet end of year academic standards, Wendy shared, "That still doesn't take away from the play time, the choice time … To me it shows if they're struggling that much with letters and sounds or writing, developmentally they're not ready for that and they're still ready for more play."

Wendy discussed how children learn and demonstrate valuable skills during play-time. She shared that when children are given the opportunity to choose on their own, "They're learning to work with other people and use their language skills to talk and ask things." Also, "They're getting fine motor skills, if they work with playdough, if they work with beads. They're not aware of that. It's not called the fine motor skill station." While Wendy did not see the standards as relating to play in the way they are written, she shared "It's definitely within my standards and what I feel they need … They'll write cards or letters or things. Or they'll choose to count, so they kind of loosely tie in with math or writing or reading." Giving a variety of

examples of skills that children learn and demonstrate during play, Wendy explained, “Cause if we don’t give them the practice and the time to practice those skills, when are they going to learn?”

Wendy referred several times to her integration of play in the classroom as an opportunity for student freedom and student-directed choice. She shared, “I give them the options and the choices,” and “It’s just giving them that choice, that freedom, to just choose on their own.” Within student-centered choice, Wendy saw value in the social-emotional skills students acquire and practice within play: “To me, it’s a huge time of sharing and taking turns. Because I don’t have unlimited of everything … You know, just learning to work together.” She explained that while providing lots of choices, she places limits on each area of the room to prevent crowding and encourage children to try new things if an area is full when it is their time to choose. She reflected on providing opportunities for emotional self-regulation saying, “I’ve had kids just sit there and cry because they didn’t get their first choice. Or they didn’t get to be at the area where their good friend is … So, it’s them realizing how big of a deal is it to sit and have a meltdown.” Recognizing the importance of emotional regulation in kindergarten, Wendy wrote a Donor’s Choose grant to acquire the materials for her Break Zone area, such as “wands with the glitter and lava stuff in them, to expandable (fidgets) to squishy toys and puppets.” While she was explicit that the Break Zone was not a play area that students could choose during choice time, it was a space available for children to use if they felt they need a social or emotional break at any time in the day.

Wendy did not express a need to advocate for play with parents or administrators. Rather, she felt that both parents and administrators were always supportive of her decision to allow for play. Wendy felt that parents primarily view the play-time as a break, “because they

see the demand and the rigor that we have now in our curriculum." Explaining that she is not a scripted teacher and likes to do thematic units such as bats, pumpkins, gingerbread, and stone soup in the fall, she said "My principals have always supported what I do," and "Thankfully, I've always had principals that support that."

Portraiture 2 summary. Wendy expressed support for play with a view towards play as meaningful learning and expressed appreciation for the support she receives from parents and administrators for integrating play. During observations, Wendy demonstrated support for play through an organized play environment, the availability of open-ended play materials, providing opportunities for free and guided play, and enforcing structures and rules to ensure student safety during play.

Portraiture 3: Sarah. Entering Sarah's classroom, visitors are first greeted by cutouts of multicultural-colored hands on the window of the classroom door. On the inside of the door, a helping hands poster shows the special student helpers of the week. It is a large classroom flooded with natural light from a wall of windows and ample space to move around. There are four large rectangular tables in the middle of the room, a kidney-shaped table, and a large rectangular standing table in the art area (see Appendix H for photographs) with play areas around the perimeter of the room. Interest centers and play areas include a dramatic play area, an art corner, and a carpet for small motor play. On the walls, the calendar is located near a small carpeted area in the front of the room. One bulletin board reflects a current unit of study, titled "We Work and Play Together." Another board is dedicated to a word wall with high frequency words and student names, while a third contains anchor charts titled "It's okay to be different" and "Every person has their special skin color," connected to multicultural children's

literature. Displayed on a line in front of the windows is student work with the headings "We are all the same" and "We are all different."

Sarah is tall, with black riding boots to her knees, leggings, and a grey sweater dress. Her wavy blonde hair is pulled back in a loose knot. When the bells rings, Sarah opens the door with a large smile on her face and greets each child as they come into the room. Several parents accompany the children into the room. After backpacks and coats are hung up, students find the laminated sentence strip with their name set out on the art table, trace their name with a whiteboard marker, and grab books for "book look" with parents. The second bell rings, and there are now pairs of parents and kids scattered around the room, moms and dads sitting awkwardly in tiny chairs side-by-side with their 5-year-olds. A few children are sitting in mom or dad's lap as they read together. Parents are asking questions, stopping to talk about illustrations, and pointing at the words as they read. Children without a parent have buddied up and are leaning in to listen with a friend. Two younger siblings, boys who appear to be two to three years old, are in the dramatic play area with pots, pans, and a whisk. One grabs a toy shopping cart and pushes it around the room between the tables of readers. After 20 minutes, Sarah rings a chime and announces, "Boys and girls, it's time to say good-bye to moms and dads." Parents and students promptly stand up, say their good-byes, put away books, and the children join Sarah to sit in a circle on the carpet in the front corner of the room.

Sarah sings a song about apple trees and students join in as they transition. When the song finishes, Sarah asks, "Who would like to choose our greeting today?" and a girl suggests the "silent greeting." Sarah begins by giving a silent hug to the students on either side of her, and the greeting is passed around a circle of calm and quiet 5-year-olds. Next, she holds up a soft knitted pumpkin and asks, "Can anyone think of what we should share when we pass our

pumpkin today?" One student suggests, "We can share what we are hopeful for." As the pumpkin is passed around the circle, students say they are hopeful today for the class being quiet, getting extra choice time, having a sunny day, playing outside, and having a silent writer's workshop.

After sharing, Sarah directs students to scoot in closer for morning message. On the easel stand, a laminated chart paper has today's date and a greeting. She tells them the message, "We are going to have extra choice time today," then leads them in sounding out each word to write and adding the appropriate punctuation – the class chooses an exclamation point. When the message is done, Sarah leads the students in segmenting consonant-vowel-consonant words as they tap their shoulder "/c/", then inner elbow "/a/", then wrist "/t/." Next, the students crabwalk from their gathering space in front of the easel about 10 feet across the room to preview today's schedule in a hanging pocket chart. Sarah walks the students through the day ahead, and then they crabwalk back to the gathering space for a writing lesson.

Once settled back on the carpet near the easel, Sarah asks, "Who can remember what kind of writing we are doing in writer's workshop?" The class is working on "Small Moments" stories, when the author tells about their own lives and zooms in on specific experiences or events. The lesson today is on stretching out words to write the sounds. Sarah writes this on a chart paper, then turns and tells the students, "I want to write about making a delicious meal with my crockpot. I'm really looking forward to eating delicious food!" She models sounding out the word as she writes "C-R-O-C" on the chart paper and sketches a crockpot. Sarah notices some students are getting a bit restless on the carpet, so they all stand and follow her in a movement break, "We're gonna wiggle, we're gonna jump, we're gonna stomp…" and then sit back down on the carpet. Sarah tells students to turn to a partner on the carpet and whisper what they will

write about today. Then Sarah asks, "What tool could I use to help me stretch out the words today?" One student suggests an alphabet chart. Sarah hands out writing journals and students move to the tables, grabbing pencils, crayons, and alphabet charts on their own after selecting a work space.

One student shares with his table mates as he sits to begin writing, "I'm going to write about making Cheez-Its." Sarah turns on classical music in the background and reminds students they are writing, not talking. Many students are quietly whispering to friends what they are planning to write about today. Sarah walks around the room, kneels beside each child, and makes observations or asks questions about their writing. She gives individual feedback to each child based on these interactions (get an alphabet chart, stretch it out, add detail) to improve their story. A few boys who are playing and not writing receive gentle reminders of the expectations, and then are directed by Sarah to move to different tables to make better choices. After 20 minutes of writing, she calls out, "Macaroni and cheese," and students respond, "And we gotta freeze." Sarah tells them writing time is over and it is time to clean up for sharing: "Before you come to the rug, you're going to clean up and share (what you wrote) with one other friend." Students start clean up and walk with their writing journals to find a friend and share. Others are putting away alphabet cards, crayons, and pencils, and pushing in chairs. "Make sure you clean up your spot before you head to the rug," Sarah reminds them.

The document camera has been turned on and the overhead screen pulled down for sharing time. Kids are sitting on the carpet with journals and Sarah sings out, "Open and shut them, open and shut them, then you're going to clap, clap, clap. Open and shut them, open and shut them, then put them in your lap, lap, lap." As volunteers are called on to share their writing, they bring their writing journal up to the teacher's desk to place it under the document camera,

then share what they have drawn and written today. When each student finishes, Sarah asks, "Can someone give a compliment?" She has a checklist of the students to mark off as they share. Following the sharing, students stand up, place their writing journals back in the basket, and then spread out for a GoNoodle (2017) movement break.

After 10 minutes of guided dancing and singing, the class gathers on the carpet. Sarah is seated in the front of the group and announces, "We just started a new unit of inquiry, and it's all about working and playing together. Today you are going to do a collaborative job. Does anyone want to guess what collaborative means?" After a few guesses, Sarah continues, "Collaboration or a collaborative job means we are going to work together. We're going to try something and see how it goes, and maybe try again." She explains that the class will be working in groups of three to draw a picture. Sarah gives the groups an option to draw a picture of the playground or the beach, and they must decide together. Students are assigned to groups of three, are provided with a large paper and then retrieve crayons and colored pencils from the shelves on their way to work at the tables. They are given 10 minutes to complete the group task.

Sarah then calls the students back to the carpet, collects their drawings, and asks them to look quietly as she shows each group's drawing. After showing all the collaborative drawings, Sarah asks, "What worked in your groups?" and records it on a chart paper under the heading, "What works." Students shared taking turns, drawing together, sharing crayons, and talking kindly. Next, Sarah asks, "Now, what were some of the things that didn't work? What were the challenges?" and writes "Challenges" on the chart paper. The students shared thinking about an idea, not agreeing with each other, and getting left out. With each challenge, Sarah asked, "How

did you work that out?" and students explained how they approached the challenges within their group.

An earthquake drill alarm sounds and students move from the carpet gathering space to crouch under the tables. A few minutes later, the drill is over and Sarah calls students back to the gathering space. Sarah asks, "What did we just practice for?" and a student responds an earthquake. She asks, "What is an earthquake?" and a student explains that the ground shakes and things fall. Sarah tells the students that just like with fire drills, we practice earthquake drills so that if the real thing happened, we would all be safe. After a busy morning, the students are dismissed to get their jackets for morning recess. "We did our jobs so fast this morning, we get to have a recess," Sarah tells the children. The class is lined up two-by-two to go outside. Reaching the covered area, Sarah stops, turns around, and counts the children as they walk past her to run two laps first, then go off to play.

Returning to the room 13 minutes later, students wipe their feet on the rug, get a quick drink, and then grab book boxes for independent reading. Students scatter throughout the room for reading time, and Sarah directs a few at a time to go wash hands for lunch and then return for reading. Between directing students to wash hands, Sarah pulls up a chair beside a few students and says, "Can you choose a book to read to me?" She has a class list and is making notes on each student's reading. Students are in chairs, on pillows, lying on the floor, and in a few comfy chairs, audibly verbalizing their reading as they read to themselves. The book boxes are a mixture of picture books, informational texts, and leveled readers. Many students are reading a paper booklet of the story *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin, Jr. and Eric Carle (1992). After 7 minutes of independent reading and hand washing, students put away book boxes and line up for lunch and recess. Sarah has lunch duty in the cafeteria the first

fifteen minutes, and then is free to have her own lunch break while the kids finish up and go to recess.

Sarah picks up her class from under the covered area and they return to the classroom, hang up their coats, sit on the carpet for calendar, and sing the song about apple trees again. A girl named Clara is asked to observe and report the weather. Another helper is called on to count the number of days in school represented by links in a chain, then tell Sarah what number to add next to the number line running along the top of the calendar bulletin board. Turning over the next card in the October calendar, Sarah asks, "Who can tell me about how the calendar pattern has changed?" and a student responds that there are four circled groups of five dots, with no dots outside a circle, which means there are twenty dots. Sarah leads the class in counting by fives to twenty as they reach across their bodies to hold up five fingers: "5, 10, 15, 20." Sarah dismisses a few students at a time to retrieve lunch bags from the bins, return them to backpacks, get a drink of water, and use the bathroom if needed throughout the calendar time.

Once all students are ready, Sarah announces, "Criss cross apple sauce and eyes up here to show me you are ready for the story." She holds up the story, *But Excuse Me That is My Book*, by Lauren Child (2006). Sarah begins the story about two siblings named Charlie and Lola who are fighting over a book, and Lola yells out, "Give it to me now! I want it now, now, now!" Sarah turns to the children and says, "Can everybody do that? Stomp your foot and say now, now, now!" The children join in. "Would that work in your house?" she asks. The children respond, "No way!" She reads with expression and at an appropriate pace to maintain engagement, stopping periodically to invite students to join in the story or make predictions. During the story, a parent volunteer enters the room and joins her daughter on the rug. The little girl climbs quietly into her lap, maintaining her attention toward Sarah and the story. When the

story concludes, Sarah turns to the class and comments, “You guys did such an awesome job listening today! Who is ready for centers?” The students cheer, and then quiet down to listen.

Sarah explains that there are two art jobs during centers—apple painting with tempera paint and watercolor painting a still life drawing of apples in a wicker basket. For apple painting, Sarah has prepared green, yellow, and red plates of tempera paint and sliced apples in half. The students will be painting with the apple halves as their applicator, dipping the flat inside of the apple into the paint tray and then applying it to a two-foot long section of brown paper towels to create an apple print. Sarah then explains, “We’re also going to paint our basket of apples you drew yesterday of our beautiful basket of apples. Has anyone painted with water color? I am going to show you how to use the water and put it in the paint. Will paint work without water?” “No,” the children say. She models how to use the watercolors properly. Then she shows the students the final job for literacy centers today, a handwriting page on the letter C: “Start at top, around and down. First two rows are for tracing. When we do tracing, what does it do? Does it help us to be ready on our own?” And students respond, “Yes.”

After previewing and modeling each of the jobs, Sarah dismisses students to go in small groups to the various jobs: apple painting/printing at the art table with the parent volunteer, letter C handwriting at two tables, and watercolor painting apple baskets at the other two tables. An additional volunteer from a local university enters the room to assist supervising centers. As students finish each job, they find an open spot at one of the other two areas to do the next task. Handwriting pages are shown to Sarah before being placed in cubbies to take home. Watercolor paintings are moved to the kidney table to dry and the paper towel apple printing takes up another table. Students who finish all three jobs take out whiteboards and markers at the gathering carpet area. Sarah tells the researcher, “Parents call this the kindergarten circus!”

Literacy centers last about 20 minutes, and then clean up begins. As tables are cleaned, students come to the circle in the gathering area. Sarah and the class is singing, "Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar," as they transition.

Once everyone is on the carpet for math, Sarah announces, "We have a fun new counting game today." She shows them the game board, asking, "What do you see?" They make observations of the game board, and then Sarah asks the girl sitting next to her to be her partner in modeling how to play the game for the class. She explains, "What you're going to do is spin the spinner, then get that many cubes, connect them, and put them on the board. We're going to keep spinning until we have two rows of five. Five and five makes ten." After a quick demonstration, she gives game boards to three students and directs them to invite a partner to play. Next, she dismisses five students at a time to pick one of three other activities: Geoboard designs; Bugs, Tallies, and Number bingo; or apple counting.

At Geoboard designs, students are stretching rubber bands to make snowflake patterns with orange rubber bands on a yellow pegboard. At bingo, each student has a number card from one-nine, and they are taking turns drawing a card from the deck that shows visual representations of the numbers. For apple counting, students have laminated ten frame cards that show a numeral and the number word, and students must place small wooden apples on the card to represent each number. After ten minutes, Sarah turns out the lights and calls, "Bump-bumpa-bump-bump" and students respond, "Bump bump." She tells them it is time to clean up and pick a new math center, but they need to quiet down. It is getting too loud. She turns the lights back on, kids clean up, and move to new centers. At the Unifix cubes counting game introduced today, three new sets of partners are starting the game. Two boys are playing together and as they see the researcher approaching, one says, "He's cheating." The researcher asks, "What do

you mean?" He then turns to the other boy and says, "You just keep spinning the biggest number closest to you so you win." They continue to play and the boy accused of cheating wins. His partner picks up the cubes, returns them to the basket, and announces, "I quit. I don't like this game." Ten minutes pass and Sarah tells the students it is time to clean up and come to the carpet.

Once seated, Sarah tells the class, "That was the noisiest math workshop we've had in a long time. We need to make sure that when we are playing games and having fun, we're still quiet." She dismisses children to use the bathroom, wash hands or get sanitizer, put on coats, and line up for recess. The class takes a 35-minute outdoor recess under the covered area since it is raining. Two girls show off their budding language skills to the researcher: "I know how to spell mom. M.O.M. I know how to spell dad. D.A.D. I know how to spell cat. C.A.T."

Returning from recess, the students return coats to the hooks and sit on the carpet for choice time. Sarah reminds the students that they need to do clean-up of materials the right way today or they will lose the materials for the next session. She goes through a basket labeled "Work to Finish" and distributes student work from today's lessons that must be completed before going to choice time. Students without work to finish go to their cubbies, collect papers, put papers in folders, and put folders in backpacks to pack up before choice time. As they finish packing up, they go directly to choice time activities.

Many students pull out scratch paper and markers and crayons at two long tables to draw and color. A boy and girl at the end of the table are playing school. "Let's do our homework," the girl says. "We're going to do our homework," the boy responds. "This is homework from my mom," he adds as he colors the page. "Yes, this is homework from my mom," the girl replies. "I did my homework," the boy announces as he holds up his finished page. Two more

girls have joined the table to do homework, coloring and writing with markers, colored pencils, and crayons.

In the art area, three kids are decorating empty shoeboxes to create book-boxes for home. The book-boxes will hold all the paper copies of books the students create throughout the school year and then get to take home to share their emerging reading abilities with families. Each student has brought in a shoebox to decorate throughout the week and finished book-boxes are on the shelf above the backpacks.

Sarah checks in with students who are finishing up work from today, commenting to one girl who is writing in her journal, "Was it a good idea to spend your whole writing time erasing your picture? I see you had a beautiful picture here, and then you erased it. It would be better to leave your picture and spend your time writing next time. I want you to have your choice time." Sarah offers support to the handful of children finishing work and sends them off to pack up and join choice time. Classical music is playing in the background, heard through the ebb and flow of chattering five-year-old voices. At one point, the children are so engaged with their play that only whispers are heard. "Wow, I like the noise level in here. It sounds really nice," Sarah comments.

Two boys and a girl are playing on a transportation-themed rug in the corner beneath the backpacks. Beside them, a shelving unit with brightly colored bins is filled with miniature plastic farm animals, cars of all shapes and sizes, and a wooden train track. Each are engaged in their own private stories but sharing the space. "Wow, it's nice and quiet over here now," Sarah observes as she walks over. They are periodically disrupted in their play by kids stepping over the horses and cars to grab shoeboxes off the shelf above them. Sarah shares with the researcher that she rearranged her play spaces after school started because the small toys, the wooden

blocks, and the dramatic play area were all on one end of the classroom and were so popular that they were creating congestion issues with all the kids crowded on end of the room. Now, the small toys are in the corner by the backpacks, the dramatic play is in the opposite corner near the windows, and the wooden blocks are located near the gathering carpet area. Moving blocks up meant moving the puzzles and pillows to the back of the room, which now seems to create a quiet buffer zone between dramatic play and the small toys play.

In the dramatic play corner, two girls are seated at the kitchen table and drawing. As the researcher approaches and sits to observe, a girl still wearing her pink rain jacket says, "I'm making a jungle." A girl with red and clear pony beads in her braided hair chimes in, "I'm making a jungle too." The girl in the pink coat is drawing a green monkey, and the girl in braids shares she is drawing a "no face monkey" in the jungle. The girl in the pink rain coat looks up to the researcher and shares, "I'm sad right now." "Why?" the researcher responds. "Because I wanted the *Frozen* book box because that's my favorite movie and Callie already wrote her name on it."

On the carpet, three boys are playing with blocks and cars. One stands and approaches the researcher to ask what she is typing. When the researcher explains that she is just watching and writing what she sees happen in the classroom, he dictates, "Write this. Three boys are on the carpet playing blocks with monster trucks. And cars. The cars try to get past them. Those boys' names are Luke and Ollie and Richard." He returns to building a wooden ramp for a car and says to the other two, "Our base is going to be awesome." The other two boys ignore him, and then he says, "I'm not going to be your best friend, Richard, if you don't let me be in your base," referring to the fact that they have crawled behind Sarah's chair and are building in the corner now. "There's not enough room," Richard calls out and continues to build his structure.

The boy looks sad, but eventually goes back to playing alone and slowly attempts to reengage with other two boys. I'm making my own base," he calls out. A fourth boy comes to the carpet and asks the two in the corner, "Can I play with you?" and gets a similar response: "There's not enough room. I've got an ambulance and a police car." The fourth boy grabs the bins of blocks, moves them to make space, and joins in building.

Sarah calls out, "Macaroni and cheese," and the children chime back, "Everybody freeze." She asks if anyone still needs to make a book box at the art table. A few kids raise hands and are called over to the table, and the rest return to their play. Sarah supervises book box making and periodically comments or corrects children at play. She takes down student work to send home and does tidying and management tasks around the room, allowing the children to just play and be self-directed.

In the dramatic play corner, a boy who had been finishing work earlier is now dressed up as a pirate with a skull head scarf, an eye patch, and a cape. The girls who were drawing jungle pictures are now pushing the toy shopping cart around with a baby doll inside. At blocks, a fifth boy has joined in but is content to play on his own. The third little boy who dictated his story to the researcher and was feeling left out is still negotiating to get into the 'base' in the corner. "Can I get in there?" he is asking again. "No, there's no space. Richard is in there and he doesn't want you going in there," is the response.

After fifty minutes of choice time, the music is turned off and Sarah calls out, "Bump bumpa bump bump," and the students chime back, "Clean up!" Clean up happens immediately. "I'm watching who does a great job," Sarah says as she walks around to supervise clean up. She writes students' names down to give compliments to those who are helping by saying, "I like how some of my friends came and helped clean up areas where they weren't even playing. Good

job! Let's see if we can all be in our circle on the carpet in 10, 9, 8," and she counts down to zero. Seated in a circle in the gathering space, Sarah passes the pumpkin around once again and asks students to share one thing they saw other students doing to be good friends. After the pumpkin is passed and everyone shares, they sing a good-bye song, singing each child's name and passing the pumpkin around the circle a final time.

When the good-bye song finishes, Sarah calls out student names four at a time to grab a pink check out card, get their coats and backpacks, and line up. Within a few minutes, all students are lined up at the door with their pink cards (a checkout system to ensure children checkout with the teacher before leaving with a parent or guardian) and head out to the covered area on the playground to meet the parents. When Sarah returns, she does a few quick tasks to prepare for the next day, and heads out the door to meet her grade level team for equity training.

During the interview, Sarah expressed a strong belief in the power of play and a well-articulated philosophy in support of play. She spoke repeatedly of developmentally appropriate practice, and play, as equal to learning for five year olds. She touched on the social-emotional skills students acquire through play, the support she receives from administrators, and her role in advocating for play with parents.

Sarah expressed a student-centered philosophy saying, "Just the students you have is the biggest influence," and "What strengths and needs they bring to the table, and trying to make sure that whatever you're offering is going to meet the needs of the individual students." Her philosophy is based upon a tenet that play is essential, "For everything, I think play is how young children learn. It's their work. So as much as possible, everything that we do in the classroom should be incorporating or through the lens of play." She reflected on her whole group time as being playful, even if it was "not necessarily traditional play." "We're singing and having fun

with each other … it seems like having fun and enjoying each other and doing a lot of that kind of stuff is building community." Her philosophy incorporates a belief in the value of inquiry-based learning: "If you're looking at learning through an inquiry lens and making the learning that you do reflect the students and what they bring, then it's easy to incorporate play." Reflecting on the influence of her student-teaching experience in a Reggio-Emilia inspired classroom, Sarah has carried with her many of the Reggio practices and beliefs. She explained, "I've spent a lot of time working on the environment as teacher and how to bring the outside in and how to set up the classroom so it is calm and inviting and nature filled." She expressed a belief in prioritizing child-directed free play: "That's why I make time every day for the kids to really have totally open, within parameters of safety basically, choices about what they want to do with their time."

Sarah discussed developmentally appropriate practice in the context of play and the existing learning standards in kindergarten. Referring to state and national standards, she said, "A lot of those things are fairly lofty given what kids are actually coming in with, into kindergarten." Later in the conversation, she explained:

> I still feel like, statewide, our standards are marginally appropriate. I think it's good to have rigorous standards but I also think you have to look at where your population is coming in. And I think I feel like we are pushing, from what I've read too, I think we are pushing down too much to the little guys and maybe asking them to do things that developmentally maybe they're not really ready to do.

While it is important to have high expectations, she feels some of the expectations are not developmentally appropriate: "I don't think you can say developmentally that all 5- and 6-year-old kids are ready to do as much, in reading for instance, as we are asking them to do." She

expressed that she tries to "Look at what I'm expecting them to be able to do and learn through a developmentally appropriate lens." Reflecting on the kindergarten units of study, such as the "Work and Play Together" observed in October, Sarah said, "I think if you're trying to come from a place, a belief in developmentally appropriate learning, then you're trying to choose topics of study that are relevant to kids at that age."

Discussing her decision to integrate play, Sarah reiterated that play is learning for young children:

> I think the decision to allow for play mostly comes from my years of experience and all the research I've read about, really we know that that's how people learn. And so even though we've decided that these really young children need to have all these standards met, we know that they learn about the world and their brain learns about things through play experiences. And so I feel like it's my duty to incorporate as much opportunity for play and do as much of the learning and learning that I have, that I'm charged with, through play because I think that's how they learn best.

Speaking of the role of the kindergarten teacher as the gatekeeper to a lifetime of learning, she said "One of your primary goals is to help kids learn to love learning and feel like school is a positive place they want to be so that they can continue." Integrating play is certainly one way Sarah ensures children learn to love learning: "They test, they explore, they inquire about things and see how they work, whether that be other kids or blocks or sand and water or whatever."

Sarah touched on the importance of play for social-emotional skill development. For children who come in with minimal prior school experience, "those social things kind of take precedence in that situation and that's not really written into your curriculum." She later shared:

> I think all the learning how we deal with each other, learning how to get our needs met, learning how to solve problems with each other, those are not part of the written curriculum but … we have to have those things taken care of first. Building that community of caring for each other and all that. And a lot of that can happen through play.

Finally, Sarah discussed her view of two primary groups of stakeholders—building administrators and parents—and the integration with play. She felt that her building administrators were highly supportive, saying, "I feel like in my building, my administrator trusts me to make decision professionally about what's best for my kids," and "I feel like I have a lot of freedom to incorporate those things that are important to me and that I believe in." While currently in a position where she is supported, Sarah shared that this has not always been the case in every school and so she has developed her skills as a play advocate. She still advocates for play with her parents by communicating frequently with them "about why I've chosen to make time every day for some free choice time. And what the kids learn from that." She explained that part of her advocacy with parents is "Giving examples of what types of skills your child might be learning when they are at block play, for instance."

Portraiture 2 summary. In the interview, Sarah expressed support for play through a well-articulated play-based philosophy of learning. She was also clear about her role as a play advocate. During observations, Sarah demonstrated support for play through an organized play environment, the availability of open-ended play materials, providing opportunities for free and guided play, and creating and enforcing structures and rules to ensure student safety during play.

Case study portraitures summary. The descriptive case study portraitures of Marie, Wendy, and Sarah provide a holistic account of how kindergarten teachers support play in the

classroom. While Chapter 4 analyzed the empirical evidence collected in this research study by phase and attribute, these portraitures put the pieces back together to show how the identified attributes of support for play – teacher perspective, opportunities, the play environment, types of play, and the role of the teacher – coalesce to form a comprehensive picture of play. Through in-depth description, analysis, and synthesis of the three case studies, the researcher aims to answer the primary research question posed in this study, "How is play supported in the kindergarten classroom?" The following discussion of results synthesizes the themes emerging from the data in relation to the literature. The synthesis presents the researcher's findings in answering the research sub-questions.

Discussion of Results in Relation to Literature

Through interviews, observations, photographs, and documentation of the three case study classrooms, five themes emerged from this study related to the support for play attributes:

- Teacher Perspective: Teachers viewed play as developmentally appropriate and synonymous with learning.
- Opportunities for Play: Teachers provided daily opportunities for free play and guided play experiences.
- Play Environment: Classroom environments provided well-defined areas and organized materials for work and play.
- Types of Play: Playful classrooms supported several types of play through child-initiated and teacher-led experiences.
- Role of the Teacher: Teachers aided play by creating structures and rules, responding to ensure safety, and advocating for play.

The five themes are discussed here as they relate to the evidence gathered through interviews and observations with Marie, Sarah, and Wendy. Themes are specific to the data gathered in this study. The discussion includes reference to the relevant research literature considered in this study as it relates to the emerging themes.

Theme 1 (teacher perspective): Teachers viewed play as developmentally appropriate and synonymous with learning. The one-on-one interviews provided the primary evidence for the attribute of teacher perspectives. Three common themes emerged from the interview data with the nine participants: a teaching philosophy valuing play, a belief that play is how young children learn, and a view that a critical role of play is developing social-emotional skills. Narrowing the scope to the case study participants, there was a slight variation in the third theme: they recognized the role of play for developing social-emotional skills as well as academic skills. These themes were subsequently confirmed by observations, suggesting that case study participants perceived the freedom to put into practice their beliefs in the power of play.

The case study participants expressed a student-centered philosophy that values play. Marie said, "Kids have a desire to play … They like to play in their world. They just do. So, we do." Wendy shared, "I base my instruction on my students, on what they need," and Sarah said, "If you're looking at learning through an inquiry lens and making the learning you do reflect the students and what they bring, then it's easy to incorporate play." Observations in the three classrooms confirmed that the teachers provide opportunities for play aligned to their stated play-based philosophy. For example, in Marie's classroom, Tub Toy Time was social play integrated into the literacy block, math centers provided for guided play with intentional learning goals, and Smiley Centers provided for child-directed free play. A teaching philosophy fully supportive of

learning through play is aligned to the constructivist theory of learning (Brooks & Brooks, 2001), seeing the child as an active learner acquiring knowledge through meaningful, real world experiences.

This student-centered philosophy was grounded in a belief that play is how young children learn. Marie explained, "I don't have to teach everything, all the time, they can play and acquire knowledge." Similarly, Sarah articulated, "For everything, I think play is how young children learn. It's their work." The National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, states, "Rather than detracting from academic learning, play appears to support the abilities that underlie such learning and thus to promote school success" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 15). During observations, the researcher saw opportunities for learning through play that went beyond the scheduled choice time each day. In all three classrooms, the math centers provided rich learning experiences as children played with numbers, counting, patterns, shapes, and math-based stories. In Sarah's classroom, inquiry-based learning opportunities such as the collaborative drawing experience provide evidence that she recognizes kids can learn what collaboration means and what skills it takes to work together not just from being told, but from the experience itself. These observations reinforce that for young children, there is no dichotomy between learning and play: "to the child, the two activities are one and the same" (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009, p. x). The playful learning approach recognizes play as synonymous with learning.

The case study participants shared a belief in the value of play for developing social-emotional skills and academic skills. Wendy explained that play is "a huge time of sharing and taking turns … Just learning to work together." Marie justified her integration of play by saying, "A lot of children do not know how to make friends or be friends." Further, they recognized

play as developing academic or cognitive skills, such as when Sarah shared, "They test, they explore, they inquire about things and see how they work, whether that be other kids or blocks or sand and water or whatever." During observations, the researcher witnessed the students practicing social-emotional skills throughout the day, but seemingly in a less-pressured environment when they were engaged in free play during choice time. In addition, all three teachers assisted with conflict resolution between children during play, a critical social skill for young children to develop. Recognizing the importance of both social-emotional and academic skill development in kindergarten, Wendy, Marie, and Sarah communicated a whole-child perspective (Ray & Smith, 2010; Slade & Griffith, 2013; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006) when they spoke of the types of learning that play might support. The whole-child perspective focuses attention on the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of learners. DeVries (2001) asserts that viewing play as integrating holistic learning goals indicates the highest level of support for play.

All three teachers not only believed in play as an authentic vehicle for learning in kindergarten, but had the freedom to turn their belief into practice in the classroom. For Marie, putting her belief into practice was accompanied by intentional play advocacy with her building administrator: "We take the time for it to make sense to an administrator that never taught kindergarten." For Wendy and Sarah, they both perceived their building administrators to be generally supportive and therefore did not have to explicitly advocate to garner support for integrating play into their teaching practice. While research suggests that administrators not trained or experienced in early childhood may pose a threat to playful learning in kindergarten (Bowdon, 2015; Lynch, 2015), these three teachers were in environments where they perceived instructional control and thus the freedom to integrate play.

The first research sub-question in the study was, "How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?" The evidence would suggest that teachers view play as inherently valuable; they view play as synonymous with learning for young children; and they view play as supporting diverse learning goals, including both social-emotional and academic development.

Theme 2 (opportunities for play): Teachers provided daily opportunities for free play and guided play experiences. Two key findings emerged on opportunities for play based on observations in the case study classrooms and examination of the teachers' weekly schedules. The first finding related to the frequency and duration of play periods, and the second finding to non-play tasks reducing opportunities for play.

Regarding the first finding, opportunities for free play during choice time and guided play during math centers were provided in all three classrooms. As shown on teacher's weekly schedules, free play during choice time was provided four days a week for periods ranging from 25 to 35 minutes and one day a week for a period ranging from 10 to 20 minutes. In all three classrooms, choice time was provided at the end of the school day. During observations, free play periods ranged from 15 to 50 minutes and guided play periods during math ranged from 20 to 30 minutes each day. Providing opportunities for both free play and guided play is aligned to high support for play (Appendix A: Support for Play Rubric). Miller and Almon (2009) assert, "Kindergarteners need a balance of child-initiated play in the presence of engaged teachers and more focused experiential learning guided by teachers" (p. 12).

DeVries (2001) and Gronlund (2010) both recommend daily play sessions of 45 minutes or more to facilitate high-level, engaged, and meaningful play to develop. In time use studies conducted by Long Island University and U.C.L.A. and referenced in *Crisis in the Kindergarten*,

a sample of 254 New York City and Los Angeles teachers reported to spend "two to three hours each day in literacy, math, and test prep … [and] 30 minutes or less each day for play, or choice time" (Miller & Almon, 2009, p. 18). While the three case study classrooms evidenced large blocks of time for literacy and math activities, no test preparation was observed and play periods ranged significantly in length of time offered to students. However, it should be noted that the longest play period was observed in Sarah's classroom on a day when her morning message to the children stated, "We will have extra choice time today." This suggests that the amount of time for play in the three case study classrooms may be similar to those surveyed in the time use studies referenced by Miller and Almon (2009). As shown on the Support for Play Rubric (Appendix A), play sessions of 30 minutes or less indicate low support for play, and those of 30-45 minutes indicate moderate support for play (DeVries, 2001; Gronlund, 2010). While duration was short to moderate in the three case study classrooms, providing daily opportunities for play indicates high support for frequency.

The second finding during observations was that non-play tasks could reduce opportunities for play. In Marie's classroom, two boys missed a brief period of choice time to conference with her on "green choices" and "red choices," although this constituted a very short amount of the overall Smiley Centers time. In both Wendy's and Sarah's classroom, finishing academic tasks was required before students were allowed choice time. This is potentially in conflict with their expressed view that play is learning, since requiring students to complete work before play suggests a blended philosophy of behaviorist and constructivist theories of learning (DeVries, 2001). While neither Wendy nor Sarah expressed a view of play as a reward during the interview, the practice of requiring academic tasks to be completed before play is one

indicator of low support for play (Appendix A: Support for Play Rubric) for the attribute of opportunities for play.

The second research sub-question in this study was, "What opportunities for play are provided in kindergarten classrooms?" Considering the three case study classrooms, daily opportunities for a mixture of free play and guided play are provided in short to moderate lengths of time. In Marie's classroom, all children participate in play, while in Sarah's and Wendy's classrooms, some children may be prevented from play to complete academic tasks.

Theme 3 (play environment): Classrooms environments provided well-defined areas and organized materials for work and play. Three key findings on the attribute of the play environment emerged from observations and photographs of the case study classrooms. First, playful environments provide a rich variety of play materials. Next, playful environments have well-defined spaces for work and play. Finally, playful environments provide interest centers to encourage specific types of play.

Evidence gathered from the three case study classrooms suggests that playful environments provide a rich variety of open-ended, interesting materials in ample quantities for multiple children to utilize. Categorizing those available to children during observations, the researcher noted dramatic play materials, art and writing materials, and small motor manipulatives and toys to be most prevalent. The materials were organized in bins, baskets, and shelves, accessible to children. Gronlund (2010) recommends that play environments with high support for play provide a range of interesting materials available in each of the play areas, enough materials available for multiple children to use, many open-ended materials, and materials organized and accessible to children. Such materials provide different possibilities for children to become engaged in new and productive ways each time they return to a play area.

Observations on these indicators evidence high support for play in all three classrooms (Appendix A: Support for Play Rubric).

The three kindergarten classrooms observed in this study evidenced playful environments with well-defined areas for work and play. Photographs of the classrooms (Appendices F, G, & H) show similar organization for defining work and play areas. All three classrooms had a carpeted whole group meeting area, work tables in the center of the room for independent and small group tasks, and play areas and interest centers around the perimeter of the room. The materials utilized to support play are in the space in which they are to be used. Additionally, all three classrooms are large spaces arranged with furniture to support routines, play, and learning. Gronlund (2010) explains that teachers who plan for play create a well-ordered environment by organizing the room into distinct spaces: "The separateness and organization of each area provides a sense of security and clarity of purpose to children" (p. 31). Harms et al. (2015) maintain that early learning environments highly supportive of play provide ample indoor space to fit all furnishings for routines, learning, and play; in such classrooms, both students and teachers can move about the space easily.

The third research sub-question in this study was, "How does the classroom environment provide for play?" Based on observational field notes and photographs of the case study classrooms, these three play environments provide a rich variety of interesting and open-ended play materials in well-defined work and play areas, including some interest centers to encourage specific types of play.

Theme 4 (types of play): Playful classrooms supported several types of play through child-initiated and teacher-led experiences. During two days of observation in each of the three case study classrooms, the researcher documented several types of play initiated by

teachers and children based on the general categories provided by Miller and Almon (2009). The findings on types of play revealed that language play, dramatic play, and small motor play were observed most frequently, with students often combining multiple types of play. Providing the space and materials to support many different types of play allows students to explore and engage and learn in diverse ways. Miller and Almon (2009) explain that the many different types of play can often overlap in engaging and rich play scenarios: "The well-developed player has a repertoire with many forms of play; the playful kindergarten supports them all" (p. 53).

Language play was observed in interactions between teachers and students, students and students, and students and parents. An extensive amount of language play in all three classrooms was teacher-initiated modeling of oral and written language through playful songs, chants, poems, read aloud stories, and composition. In Sarah's classroom, a poem titled "Hickety Pickety" was used to teach sight words and "Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar" was utilized to aid transitions from work time at the tables to a whole group session on the carpet. In Wendy's classroom, animal puppets created by the students were used to accompany the storytelling of *Bear Snores On* by Karma Wilson (2002). Student-to-student and even student-to-self storytelling was observed in all three classrooms when the children were engaged in other types of play, such as counting plastic bugs, building with Legos, or constructing with wooden blocks.

Dramatic play, also called make-believe or pretend play, was observed in the three classrooms. All instances of dramatic play documented in researcher field notes were student-initiated, predominantly during free choice play periods. Dramatic play was observed in the dramatic play interest center of each room, but also simultaneously with other types of play, such as construction play and small motor play. In Marie's classroom, two girls created a mommy-

and-kitty storyline in the dramatic play corner. In both Marie's and Sarah's classrooms, students were observed playing school during choice time. In Marie's room, a miniature whiteboard easel, whiteboard markers, and a wipe-off ABC book were a Smiley Center on the carpet area for three children. In Sarah's room, a group of children took scratch paper, pencils, crayons, and markers to the tables and began a play scenario involving doing homework. The instances of dramatic play observed suggest the integral role of language play, especially in the form of storytelling and negotiating roles in play scenarios.

Small motor play with small toys and manipulatives was frequently observed in the three case study classrooms. It was extensive during math centers, when students were building with Polydrons, pattern blocks, Unifix cubes, and Geoboards, and playing with plastic sea creatures. Small motor play in the form of Lego building also occurred in the three classrooms. A variety of cars, airplanes, and houses were constructed out of Legos, primarily by boys. In Marie's classroom, her Tub Toy Time bins were filled with a variety of small plastic toys and she provided small motor play during Smiley Centers with playdough. During the second observation day in Sarah's classroom, students formed letters with Wikki Stix and moving colorful pom-pom balls with tweezers when literacy jobs were completed. Small motor play frequently accompanied other types of play, such as dramatic, language, and construction play.

The fourth research sub-question in this study was, "What types of play are present in kindergarten classrooms?" While multiple types of play were observed and documented, the three most prevalent in the case study classrooms were language play, dramatic play, and small motor play. These types of play did not occur in isolation, but rather were often seen combined in student-initiated play scenarios.

Theme 5 (role of the teacher): Teachers aided play by creating structures and rules, responding to ensure safety, and advocating for play. Evidence for the attribute on the role of the teacher was gathered through interviews and observations of the case study participants. Since teacher practices often extend beyond what can be observed, such as before play preparations and after play reflections, the researcher considered primarily the teacher's self-reported practices in the interviews, using observations as confirming evidence. According to Drucker et al. (2007) teachers demonstrate high support for play by planning for each play area, creating lesson plans to reflect play goals, providing play materials, setting aside time for play, having clear structures for delineating the choices available each day, and developing rules and guidelines to ensure safety and high level play. The evidence on the final attribute, role of the teacher, revealed three key findings among case study participants: teachers create structures and rules for safe, non-chaotic play; teachers respond to play to ensure safety; and teachers advocate for the importance of play with key stakeholders, such as administrators and parents.

In interviews and observations with the case study participants, the most frequently documented role of the teacher was creating structure and rules for play. During interviews, all three teachers spoke explicitly about their role in developing clear structures and expectations to support safe and non-chaotic play times. Marie spoke about how she structured Smiley Centers by putting a visual cue for the number limits in each area: "There's little Smiley Faces on each one. So, there's four in the house area. There's four little smiley faces." Visual cuing systems for limiting numbers of students in each play area was seen during observations in both Marie's and Wendy's classrooms. Wendy shared how expectations for cleaning up after choice time is part of her structure and rules, and that if clean up does not happen in a timely manner or to the expectation, then students can lose certain play areas the following day: "It seems it's organized

chaos. But the kids know the routine. And when I give the signal, they clean up." Clean up routines were observed in all three classrooms. Additional structures and rules mentioned during the interviews and confirmed by observations included modeling how to use materials, utilizing a planning or choosing board, setting voice level expectations, and limiting choice time due to student actions. Finally, all three teachers used timers or time limits for both work and play periods, communicating time through verbal, visual, and auditory signals throughout the day.

During observations, the researcher noted that a common teacher practice during play was responding to ensure safety. This included pre-teaching expectations, problem-solving with students, correcting behaviors, and enforcing consequences. The most frequent way the teachers responded to ensure safety was through problem-solving with students. In Wendy's classroom, a boy approached her because another boy took a toy without asking. She walked over with the child to guide him in using his words to solve the problem. In Sarah's classroom, where number limits were not set on each play area or interest center, wild play erupted from the dramatic play corner during one observation. Sarah walked over calmly and asked, "What's going on here?" and then commented on the large number of children in the space: "Maybe with six kids here, that's why we're getting a little crazy." After sharing that the small table and chairs came from her grandmother's house and she would hate to see them ruined, Sarah walked away. The practice of problem-solving by guiding students as opposed to problem-solving for students by dictating or telling the children what to do was evident in all three classrooms to ensure student safety during play.

Drawing primarily from the interviews with case study participants, the role of the teacher as play advocate with administrators and parents was an emerging theme. Reflecting on play and standards, Marie said, "Standards aren't written with play in mind … So, sometimes

you just have to be a little bit of a rebel and tell your boss that this (play) is a good idea and why and hope for the best." She recognizes the importance of integrating play and justifying the integration with principals who may not have any experience or expertise in early childhood: "They need to play with each other and they need to play by themselves and they need to work as groups and partners and here's why … We take the time for it to make sense to an administrator that never taught kindergarten." While Wendy reported to always feel supported by building administrators and therefore not need to justify the integration of play with her principal, she did mention that she is intentional in speaking about the role of play during her curriculum night or back-to-school night in the fall. Sarah also shared how important it is to advocate with parents by educating them on play:

> I like to share articles about play with my parents and send them home or offer them on my blog or put them on the bulletin boards so that people who are interested in learning more about it and don't have the benefit of reading about it on their own have an opportunity to learn more about it.

Sarah summed up the role of teacher as play advocate:

> I think that there are lots of people who don't really get how important it (play) is, and I think it's important to be a vocal advocate for play in our schools as we push all the academic stuff down more.

The final research sub-question was, "How do kindergarten teachers support play and learning through play?" Based upon the evidence gathered from the three case studies, kindergarten teachers support play by creating structure and rules for play; responding to ensure safety during play; and advocating for play.

Limitations

The researcher set the boundaries of the cases in this multiple case study (Yin, 2014) to focus on support for play in the natural setting of public school kindergarten classrooms. As a qualitative research study, it was not the intent to generalize the findings to a larger population. Rather, describing how kindergarten teachers are supporting play through the framework of the five attributes was the focus of the study. This methodological constraint preventing generalizations was one limitation of the study. However, according to Maxwell (2013) it may be possible to generalize theories or processes which could provide opportunities for future exploration of the study's research questions.

The purposeful sampling strategy of criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to identify similar cases that met the pre-determined criterion of a teaching philosophy and practice supportive of play. The goal of purposeful sampling is to achieve a depth of understanding about the research problem (Palinkas et al., 2013). A limitation of this study is that no cases of maximum variation were selected, such as a teacher who professes a behaviorist philosophy or a teaching practice dominated by standards-based, direct instruction. Cases of maximum variation would allow the researcher to describe in detail the similarities and differences across the cases.

Finally, the study's unit of analysis, support for play, was translated into a rubric based on five attributes to make the vague concept "support for play" more definable through clear indicators. The rubric and corresponding attributes were based on research in the field of early childhood education by proponents of playful learning. However, additional research may be available to strengthen the rubric categories or add additional categories of support for play not considered previously by the researcher. The use of the rubric to guide purposeful sampling and to evaluate support for play should be considered when evaluating the findings of this study.

Implications of the Results for Practice

This research study was built upon a conceptual framework that considered foundations of early learning (Bertram, 2012; Comenius, 1893; Manning, 2005; Mooney, 2013; Uzgalis, 2015), longitudinal play studies (Campbell et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), empirical research on free play (Ginsburg et al., 2001; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006), and research on guided play (Fisher et al., 2013; Han et al.,2010) support the primary argument that young children learn best through play. The research base is so strong that the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, has identified playful learning as best practice in early childhood (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In this study, the researcher sought to describe how kindergarten teachers are supporting play and learning through play in public school classrooms. The aim of the research was especially relevant considering recent studies suggesting that play in kindergarten has become a "casualty" of standards-based instruction (Bowdon, 2015) and referring to the loss of play that has coincided with increasing reading and math instruction as a "crisis in kindergarten" (Miller & Almon, 2009). The findings of this research study seem to suggest that despite the pressures that could potentially limit play in kindergarten, some teachers are still making space in their classroom for play. While the case study data was limited to only three classrooms, the survey gathered quantitative survey data from a larger population of teachers who reported to believe in and integrate play. This is hopeful and inspiring for educators who believe in the power of play to provide meaningful and rich learning experiences for young children.

Considering the findings presented in Chapter 4 from the three phases of the study, as well as the descriptive case studies presented and analyzed in this chapter, the research results seem to lend support for the following recommendations of teaching practice.

Provide equal opportunities for play. Teachers with a constructivist philosophy who believe that play is synonymous with learning should not require "work" to limit "play" opportunities. Making students complete academic tasks such as worksheets during choice time may unintentionally communicate that play is a reward, rather than a rich opportunity for learning itself. It creates a dichotomy between work and play, which is not consistent with the playful learning approach (DeVries, 2001). While a dichotomy may exist from the adult's perception separating learning and play, "to the child, the two activities are one and the same" (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009, p. x).

Balance free play and guided play experiences. There are two components or variations of play within the playful learning approach: child-initiated free play and teacher-guided play (Miller & Almon, 2009). Both provide rich opportunities for learning. Free play was observed in the three case study classrooms during choice time, with children engaged in self-directed, motivating activities (Elkind, 2007). The researcher observed that the play environment provided a rich variety of materials to foster child-initiated discovery. Additionally, during free play the teacher can observe students to document the skills being developed and note student interests expressed.

During the study, guided play was mainly observed during math, but could be implemented across the curriculum and integrated into choice time. The concept of guided play has two primary components: the environment and the teacher. Thus, play is guided by arranging materials or activities in the classroom to foster discovery and by the intentional interactions of the teacher who "watches for opportunities to interact with children during naturally occurring 'teachable moments,' when the child is poised to learn new concepts" (Gordon, 2012, p. 84). The role of the teacher as facilitator or co-creator of learning through

play experiences is essential within a playful learning pedagogy (Fisher et al., 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009). Providing regular opportunities for both free play and guided play experiences is a developmentally appropriate practice in kindergarten classrooms (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Provide teacher training on integrating meaningful play. During observations in the kindergarten classrooms, the researcher noted that the three teachers primarily utilized choice time for free play. The teachers interacted minimally, beyond intervening to ensure safety and to problem-solve when social problems arose. It would be beneficial to provide training to kindergarten teachers on how to observe students, taking note of student interests and weave those insights into future curriculum planning. While simply providing the time for play is valuable, supporting meaningful and engaging play is different than allowing for chaotic or simplistic play (Gronlund, 2010). Beyond providing time for free play, teachers could learn how to utilize the time to inform and enrich instruction. Training would inform teachers of the various roles they may fulfill to make play periods meaningful (Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

In this study, the teachers seemed to perceive free play as the most valuable form of play to provide based on how they scheduled their day into blocks of literacy, math, and choice time. During interviews, none of the teachers mentioned guided play, which seems to suggest that when these teachers think of play they mostly think of free play. Training kindergarten teachers to integrate guided play for purposeful instructional goals could provide them with a valuable instructional tool to meet the demands of a standards-based education system while utilizing a child-centered approach (Fisher et al., 2010; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Weisberg et al., 2013; Weisberg et al., 2015). While teachers should be actively present to observe and accept free

play, scaffolding learning during guided play experiences is essential to capitalize on teachable moments.

Observe and collaborate with teachers who support play. As a researcher and a fellow kindergarten teacher, the observations in Marie's, Wendy's, and Sarah's classrooms provided not only rich data for this study but also invaluable insight to strengthen my own teaching practice. For kindergarten teachers who believe in the power of play and are striving to make space for play within their classrooms, peer observation and collaboration may help them to integrate play in the classroom in more meaningful ways. Collaboration among teachers who integrate play in the classroom could allow for collegial support and bringing the benefits of playful learning to more children.

Know the play research and advocate for play. Kindergarten teachers need to be play advocates to parents, administrators, and their wider school community. Many teachers spoke of their role as a play advocate primarily with building principals and parents. Educating principals and parents about the value of play and how the integration of play can further educational learning goals is an essential role for teachers who support play. To be a persuasive play advocate may require one to be knowledgeable about the strong research base that supports play. Beyond an intuitive sense that play helps children to learn, teachers who are armed with the knowledge that play truly is learning may be more convincing in advocating for the role of play in the classroom (Jacobson & Simpson, 2007; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2014). Advocacy groups for play, such as the National Institute for Play (n.d.), provide ample information that would assist teachers in advocating for play from an informed position.

Recommendations for Further Research

Each of the five emergent themes discovered during this study and identified in the discussion of results in relation to literature represent areas for further research. For example, on the attribute of teacher perspectives, this study found that kindergarten teachers view play as developmentally appropriate and synonymous with learning. Investigating how kindergarten teachers define or understand "developmentally appropriate practice" may represent an opportunity for future research.

The delimitations, or intentional boundary choices by the researcher, represent additional areas for further research. In this study, the research was bound to kindergarten teachers only and confined to a single urban school district. The research questions could be investigated by sampling preschool and kindergarten teachers, for example, to compare how the two populations support play. Further, the study could be replicated in a different geographic region, in a rural school district, or in a combination of public, private, and charter school settings for comparison.

The researcher limited the number of cases to three based on multiple case study design recommendations for independent researchers (Yin, 2014) and used criterion sampling to select similar cases. Future research could potentially expand the number of cases as well as explore cases of maximum variation. Cases of maximum variation would allow the researcher to explore those features unique to playful learning classrooms by comparison to standards-based classrooms.

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology and a multiple case study design to approach the research problem. Data was collected through surveys, one-on-one interviews, and observations. To further explore the themes discovered in this study, other methodologies or methods could be employed to investigate the findings. For example, narrative research may be

appropriate to allow kindergarten teachers to document how they support play by journaling on their experiences throughout the school year. A quantitative methodology could be employed to gather data on the frequency and types of interactions between teachers and students during play periods to enrich our understanding of the role of the teacher.

Impact on the Researcher

Conducting this research study had a significant impact on the researcher as a current kindergarten teacher. To appropriately reflect on this impact, I will step out of my "researcher voice" and into first person. When I began my doctoral journey, I was a fifth grade teacher intensely interested in how technology in the classroom could enhance student learning. A year into my doctoral program, I made a major switch from private to public schools and from fifth grade to kindergarten. At that time, I had no idea how substantial and rewarding the shift in grade levels would be in my lifelong career as an educator. During the last three years teaching kindergarten, I have learned from my students that integrating play and playful learning into the classroom is one of the best ways to engage their natural interests and desires. And yet, when I first started to allow for play – and I say "allow" because I felt that my administrators in the first year of my teaching kindergarten believed in and encouraged a more direct instruction approach – it initially was from the philosophical standpoint of "play as a break" as opposed to "play as meaningful learning." My interest in play to support meaningful learning in the classroom, the focus of this research study, emerged from my own desire to better meet my students' needs in the classroom in a way that was both fun and developmentally appropriate instruction practice.

When I began researching the integration of play in the kindergarten classroom for my study, I realized that my primary interest was how different kindergarten teachers were finding a way to make space for play that supports learning. This naturally led to selecting a case study

approach. While I anticipated that observing kindergarten teachers "in action" in the classroom would provide valuable data for the study, I did not anticipate the profound impact those observations would have on me as a fellow teacher and on my teaching practice. I learned invaluable lessons as a teacher during my observations that I would then integrate into my own teaching practices when I returned to my classroom. As part of our morning meeting on the day following each observation, I would share with my own students that I was gone for the day because I was visiting other kindergarten teachers and learning from them how to be a better teacher. After each observation, there would be some new strategy or song or chant I would share and many have become part of our regular routines. Watching the level of engagement in Sarah's classroom as she chanted "Hickety Pickety" to practice sight words made me realize that was a wonderful strategy I could borrow for sight words in my own classroom. It is now a regular part of our morning message to review three or four sight words each day to the "Hickety Pickety" chant.

Returning from one observation day, a particularly expressive and boisterous boy in my classroom jokingly moaned, "Are you going to teach us more new stuff you learned?!" As any teacher can probably relate, being absent for any reason from school – whether sickness, training, or personal reasons – is sometimes more work that it is worth. However, my days observing the three teachers helped me learn how to be a better teacher. I feel fortunate to have been given this opportunity as a researcher and as an educator to learn and grow and improve my practice in a way that will benefit my current and future kindergarten children.

Conclusion

This chapter provided case study portraitures, a discussion of the study's five emergent themes in the context of reviewed literature, and resolution of the research questions. The

study's limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research were also discussed. The emergent themes discovered during this study suggest that kindergarten teachers are supporting play by viewing play as developmentally appropriate and synonymous with learning; providing daily opportunities for free and guided play; creating well-defined areas and organizing materials for work and play; providing multiple types of play in child-initiated and teacher-guided experiences; and by creating structures and rules, responding to ensure safety, and advocating for play. It is significant and inspiring to discover that play is being supported in public school kindergarten classrooms. The teachers in this study seem to appreciate that, in the words of Brown (2009), "Play isn't the enemy of learning, it's learning's partner. Play is like fertilizer for brain growth. It's crazy not to use it" (p 101).

References

Almon, J., & Miller, E. (2011, November). *The crisis in early education: A research-based case for more play and less pressure.* New York, NY: Alliance for Childhood. Retrieved from http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/crisis_in_early_ed.pdf

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

ATLAS.ti. (2016). ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis [software]. Retrieved from http://atlasti.com/

Bassok, D., Latham, S., & Rorem, A. (2016). Is kindergarten the new first grade? *AERA Open 1*(4), 1–31 . doi: 10.1177/2332858415616358

Bellin, H. F., & Singer, D. G. (2006). My magic story car: Video-based play intervention to strengthen emergent literacy of at-risk preschoolers. In D. G. Singer, R. M. Golinkoff, & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.), *Play = learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth* (pp. 101–123). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bernard, H. R. (2002). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (3rd ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Bergen, D., & Mauer, D. (2000). Symbolic play, phonological awareness, and literacy skills at three age levels. In K. Roskos & J. F. Christie (Eds.), *Play and literacy in early childhood: Research from multiple perspectives* (pp. 45–62). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Berk, L.E. & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding children's learning : Vygotsky and early childhood education*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bertram, C. (2012). Jean Jacques Rousseau. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012). Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/rousseau/

Blair, C., & Razza, R. P. (2007). Relating effortful control, executive function, and false belief understanding to emerging math and literacy ability in kindergarten. *Child Development*, *78*, 647–663. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01019.x

Bonawitz, E., Shafto, P., Gweon, H., Goodman, N. D., Spelke, E., & Schulz, L. (2011). The double-edged sword of pedagogy: Instruction limits spontaneous exploration and discovery. *Cognition*, *120*(3), 322–330. doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2010.10.001

Bowdon, J. (2015). The Common Core's first casualty: Playful learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(8), 33–37. doi: 10.1177/0031721715583960

Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Bredekamp, S. (Ed.). (1987). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8.* (Expanded edition). Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Bredekamp, S. (1991). Redeveloping early childhood education: A response to Kessler. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *6*, 199–209.

Bronson, M. B. (2000). *Self-regulation in early childhood: Nature and nurture*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (2001). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. New York, NY: Avery.

Burts, D. C., Hart, C. H., Charlesworth, R., Fleege, P., Mosley, J., & Thomasson, R. H. (1992). Observed activities and stress behaviors of children in developmentally appropriate and inappropriate kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 7, 297–318. doi:10.1016/0885-2006(92)90010-V

Campbell, F. A., Pungello, E. P., Burchinal, M., Kainz, K., Pan, Y., Wasik, B. H., … Ramey, C. T. (2012). Adult outcomes as a function of an early childhood educational program: An Abecedarian Project follow-up. *Developmental Psychology*, *48*(4), 1033–1043. doi: 10.1037/a0026644

Campbell, F. A., Pungello, E. P., Miller-Johnson, S., Burchinal, M., & Ramey, C. T. (2001). The development of cognitive and academic abilities: Growth curves from an early childhood education experiment. *Developmental Psychology*, *37*, 231–242. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.37.2.231

Campbell, F. A., & Ramey, C. T. (1995). Cognitive and school outcomes for high-risk African-American students at middle adolescence: Positive effects of early intervention. *American Educational Research Journal*, *32*, 743–772. doi: 10.3102/00028312032004743

Campbell, F. A., Ramey, C. T., Pungello, E. P., Sparling, J., & Miller-Johnson, S. (2002). Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian Project. *Applied Developmental Science*, *6*, 42–57. doi: 10.1207/S1532480XADS0601_05

Cazden, C. (1988). Social interaction as scaffold. In M. Lightfoot & N. Martin (Eds.), *The word for teaching Is learning: Essays for James Britton.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Child, L. (2006). *But excuse me that is my book.* New York, NY: The Penguin Group.

Christie, J. F., & Enz, B. (1992). The effects of literacy play interventions on preschoolers' play patterns and literacy development. *Early Education and Development, 3*, 205–220. doi: 10.1207/s15566935eed0303_1

Clawson, M. (2002). Play of language: Minority children in an early childhood setting. In J. L. Roopnarine (Ed.), *Play and culture studies, Vol. 4: Conceptual, social-cognitive, and contextual issues in the fields of play* (pp. 93–110). Westport, CT: Ablex.

Cloran, C. (2005). Contexts for learning. In F. Christie (Ed.), *Pedagogy and the shaping of consciousness: Linguistic and social process* (pp. 31–65). London: Continuum.

Cohen, N., & Arieli, T. (2011). Field research in conflict environments: Methodological challenges and snowball sampling. *Journal of Peace Research, 48*(4), 423–435. doi: 10.1177/0022343311405698

Comenius, J. A. (1893). *Comenius' school of infancy: An essay on the education of youth during the first six years*. Boston, MA: D.C. Heath.

Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Copple, C., Sigel, I. E., & Saunders, R. A. (1984). *Educating the young thinker: Classroom strategies for cognitive growth*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J.W. & Miller, D.L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice, 39,* 124–130.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davidson, J. I. F. (1998). Language and play: Natural partners. In D. P. Fromberg & D. Bergen (Eds.), *Play from birth to twelve and beyond: Contexts, perspectives, and meanings* (pp. 175–183). New York, NY: Garland.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.) (pp. 1–19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeVries, R. (2001). Transforming the "play-oriented curriculum" and work in constructivist early education. In A. Goncu & E.L. Klein (Eds.), *Children in play, story, and school* (pp. 72–106). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Diamond, A., Barnett, W. S., Thomas, J., & Munro, S. (2007). The early years: Preschool program improves cognitive control. *Science, 318,* 1387–1388. doi: 10.1126/science.1151148

Dickinson, D., & Moreton, J. (1991). Predicting specific kindergarten literacy skills from 3-year-olds' preschool experiences. Paper presented at the *Biennial Meeting of Society for Research in Child Development*. Seattle, WA.

Dickinson, D. K., & Tabors, P. O. (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Drucker, J., Franklin, M. B., & Schecter, B. (2007). *Alliance for Childhood/CDI kindergarten research project final report*. Bronxville, NY: Child Development Institute, Sarah Lawrence College. Retrieved from https://www.sarahlawrence.edu/cdi

Duncan, G. J., Dowsett, C. J., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston, A. C., Klebanov, P., … Japel, C. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, *43*(6), 1428–1446. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.43.6.1428

Duncan, R. M., & Tarulli, D. (2003). Play as the leading activity of the preschool period: Insights from Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Bakhtin. *Early Education and Development*, *14*, 271–292. doi: 10.1207/s15566935eed1403_2

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.). (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

Elias, C. L., & Berk, L. E. (2002). Self-regulation in young children: Is there a role for sociodramatic play? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *17*(2), 216–238.

Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: How spontaneous, imaginative activities lead to happier, healthier children*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Lifelong.

Every Student Succeeds Act. (2015). U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

Fabes, R. A., Eisenberg, N., Hanish, L. D., & Spinrad, T. L. (2001). Preschoolers' spontaneous emotion vocabulary: Relations to likability. *Early Education and Development*, *12*(1), 11–27. doi: 10.1207/s15566935eed1201_2

Fantuzzo, J., & McWayne, C. (2002). The relationship between peer-play interactions in the family context and dimensions of school readiness for low-income preschool children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *94*(1), 79–87. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.94.1.79

Fantuzzo, J., Sekino, Y., & Cohen, H. L. (2004). An examination of the contributions of interactive peer play to salient classroom competencies for urban head start children. *Psychology in the Schools*, *41*, 323–336. doi: 10.1002/pits.10162

Fein, G. G. (1981). Pretend play in childhood: An integrative review. *Child Development*, *52*(4), 1095–1118. doi: 10.2307/1129497

Fisher, K.R. (2009). *ABC's and 1..2..3: Exploring informal learning in early childhood*. Unpublished manuscript, Temple University.

Fisher, K., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Singer, D. G., & Berk, L. (2010). Playing around in school: Implications for learning and educational policy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Play* (pp. 341–363). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Fisher, K. R., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Newcombe, N., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013). Taking shape: Supporting preschoolers' acquisition of geometric knowledge through guided play. *Child Development*, *84*(6), 1872–1878. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12091

Flanagan, F. M. (2005). *Greatest educators ever*. London: Continuum International Publishing.

Fowler, F.J. (2014). *Survey research methods* (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Franklin, B. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/benjaminfr109062.html

Froebel, F. (1887). *The education of man*. New York, NY: Appleton-Entury Crofts.

Froebel, F. (1889). *Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel*. Syracuse, NY: Bardeen.

Gathercole, S., Tiffany, C., Briscoe, J., Thorn, A. & the ALSPAC Team. (2005). Developmental consequences of phonological loop deficits during early childhood: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *46*, 598–611. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2004.00379.x

Ginsburg, H. P., Pappas, S., & Seo, K. H. (2001). Everyday mathematical knowledge: Asking young children what is developmentally appropriate. In *Psychological perspectives on early childhood education: Reframing dilemmas in research and practice* (pp. 181–219). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gold, R. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces, 36,* 217–233. doi: 10.2307/2573808

Goldstein, L. S. (2007). Embracing pedagogical multiplicity: Examining two teachers' instructional responses to the changing expectations for kindergarten in U.S. public schools. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *21*(4), 378–399. doi: 10.1080/02568540709594602

Golinkoff, R. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Singer, D. G. (2006). Why play = learning: A challenge for parents and educators. In D. G. Singer, R. M. Golinkoff, & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.), *Play = learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth.* (pp. 3–12). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

GoNoodle. (2017). [Website]. Retrieved from www.gonoodle.com

Gordon, R. A. (2012). Playful learning in early childhood. In *The Illinois Report* (pp. 84–89). Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Gronlund, G. (2010). *Developmentally appropriate play: Guiding young children to a higher level.* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Gullo, D. F., & Hughes, K. (2011). Reclaiming kindergarten: Part I. Questions about theory and practice. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 38,* 323–328. doi: 10.1007/s10643-010-0429-6

Han, M., Moore, N., Vukelich, C., & Buell, M. (2010). Does play make a difference? How play intervention affects the vocabulary learning of at-risk preschoolers. *American Journal of Play, 3,* 82–105. Retrieved from http://www.journalofplay.org/issues/3/1/article/does-play-make-difference-how-play-intervention-affects-vocabulary-learning-risk

Harms, T., Clifford, R. M., & Cryer, D. (2015). *Early childhood environment rating scale* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). Accountability shovedown: Resisting the standards movement in early childhood education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *83*(6), 457–463. doi: 10.1177/003172170208300611

Henderson, S. D., Many, J. E., Wellborn, H. P., & Ward, J. (2002). How scaffolding nurtures the development of young children's literacy repertoire: Insiders' and outsiders' collaborative understandings. *Reading Research and Instruction*, *41*(4), 309–330. doi: 10.1080/19388070209558374

HighScope Preschool Curriculum. (2015). HighScope Educational Research Foundation. Retrieved from www.highscope.org

Hirsh-Pasek, K. (1991). Pressure or challenge in preschool? How academic environments affect children. In L. Rescorla, M. C. Hyson, & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.), *New directions in child development. Academic instruction in early childhood: Challenge or pressure?* (pp. 39–46). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2003). *Einstein never used flashcards: How our children really learn - and why they need to play more and memorize less*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale.

Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R., Berk, L., & Singer, D. (2009). *A mandate for playful learning in preschool: Presenting the evidence.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hughes, C., & Dunn, J. (1998). Understanding mind and emotion: Longitudinal associations with mental-state talk between young friends. *Developmental Psychology, 34*, 1026–1037. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.34.5.1026

Jacobson, L., & Simpson, A. (2007). Communicating about early childhood education. *Young Children, 62*(3), 89–92. Retrieved from https://oldweb.naeyc.org/ece/pdf/CommunicatingEarlyChildhoodEducationYC0507.pdf

Johnson, A. (1998). *Julius.* New York, NY: Orchard Books.

Johnson, J. E., Christie, J. F., & Wardle, F. (2005). *Play, development, and early education.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Jones, E. & Reynolds, G. (2011). *The play's the thing: Teachers' roles in children's play.* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ladd, G. W., & Birch, S. H. (1997). The teacher-child relationship and children's early school adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology, 35*(1), 61–79. doi: 10.1016.S0022-4405(96)00029-5

Ladd, G. W., Birch, S. H., & Buhs, E. S. (1999). Children's social and scholastic lives in kindergarten: Related spheres of influence? *Child Development, 70*(6), 1373–1400. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00101

Ladd, G. W., Kochenderfer, B. J., & Coleman, C. C. (1997). Classroom peer acceptance, friendship, and victimization: Distinct relational systems that contribute uniquely to

children's school adjustment? *Child Development*, *68*(6), 1181–1197. doi: 10.2307/1132300

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 163–188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lindsey, E. W., & Colwell, M. J. (2003). Preschoolers' emotional competence: Links to pretend and physical play. *Child Study Journal*, *33*(1), 39–52.

Liu, F., & Maitlis, S. (2010). Nonparticipant Observation. In Albert J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research.* (pp. 610–612). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Retrieved from http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/encyc-of-case-study-research/n229.xml

Love, J., Ryer, P., & Faddis, B. (1992). *Caring environments: Program quality in California's publicly funded child development programs.* Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research.

Lynch, M. (2015). More play please: The perspectives of kindergarten teachers on play in the classroom. *American Journal of Play*, *7*(3), 347–370. Retrieved from http://www.journalofplay.org/issues/7/3/article/3-more-play-please-perspective-kindergarten-teachers-play-classroom

Manning, J. P. (2005). Rediscovering Froebel: A call to re-examine his life & gifts. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *32*(6), 371–376. doi: 10.1007/s10643-005-0004-8

Marcon, R. A. (1992). Differential effects of three preschool models on inner-city 4-year-olds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7*(4), 517–530. doi: 10.1016/0885-2006(92)90060-C

Marcon, R. (1994). *Early learning and early identification follow-up study: Transition from the early to the later childhood grades 1990–93.* Washington, DC: District of Columbia Public Schools.

Marcon, R. (1999). Differential impact of preschool models on development and early learning of inner-city children: A three cohort study. *Developmental Psychology, 35*, 358–375. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.35.2.358

Marcon, R. (2002). Moving up the grades: Relationships between preschool model and later school success. *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 4*, 517–530. Retrieved from http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4n1/marcon.html

Martin Jr., B. & Carle, E. (1992). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* (Revised ed.). New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McLeod, S. A. (2014). *Lev Vygotsky*. Retrieved from www.simplepsychology.org/vygotsky.html

McLeod, S. A. (2015). *Jean Piaget*. Retrieved from www.simplepsychology.org/piaget.html

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). *Crisis in the kindergarten: Why children need to play in school*. College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood. Retrieved from http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/kindergarten_report.pdf

Mizzy, V. (1991). The Addams family. On *Original music from the Addams family* [CD]. New York, NY: RCA Records.

Mooney, C.G. (2013). *Theories of childhood: An introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget, and Vygotsky* (2nd ed.). St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Professional Library.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1986). Position statement on developmentally appropriate practice in programs for 4- and 5-year-olds. *Young Children*, *41*(6), 20–29.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2014). *Defining and advocating for play* (p. 1–7). Retrieved from http://www.naeyc.org/yc/files/yc/file/201407/Play_Memos_YC0514.pdf

National Education Association. (2006). *ESEA: It's time for a change! NEA's positive agenda for the ESEA reauthorization* (p. 34). Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/fulltext/ED496307.pdf

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards.* National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/frequently-asked-questions/

National Institute for Play. (n.d.). [Website.] Retrieved from http://www.nifplay.org/

Nicolopoulou, A., McDowell, J., & Brockmeyer, C. (2006). Narrative play and emergent literacy: Storytelling and storyacting meet journal writing. In Dorothy G. Singer, R. M. Golinkoff, & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.), *Play = Learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth* (pp. 124–144). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

No Child Left Behind Act, Pub. L. No. 107-110 (2001). Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf

Ogan, A., & Berk, L. E. (2009). Effects of two approaches to make-believe play training on development of self regulation in Head Start children. Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development. Denver, CO.

Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2013). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research.* doi: 10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pellegrini, A. D. (2009). Research and policy on children's play. *Child Development Perspectives*, *3*(2), 131–136. doi: 10.1111/j.1750-8606.2009.00092.x

Pellegrini, D. A., & Galda, L. (1990). Children's play, language, and early literacy. *Topics in Language Disorders*, *10*(3), 76–88.

Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.

Piaget, J. (1973). *The child and reality: Problems of genetic psychology*. (A. Rosin, Trans.). New York, NY: Grossman Publishers.

Priddy, R. (2004). *Dinosaur A-Z: For kids who really love dinosaurs!* New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Qualtrics. (2016). [Website]. Retrieved from http://www.qualtrics.com/

Ramey, C. T., & Campbell, F. A. (1984). Preventive education for high risk children: Cognitive consequences of the Carolina Abecedarian Project. *American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 88*, 515–523.

Ramey, C. T., & Campbell, F. A. (1991). Poverty, early childhood education and academic competence: The Abecedarian experiment. In A. Houston (Ed.), *Children in poverty: Child development and public policy* (pp. 190 –221). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Raposo. J. (1971). If you're happy and you know it. Redford, NY: Jonico Music.

Ray, K., & Smith, M. C. (2010). The kindergarten child: What teachers and administrators need to know to promote academic success in all children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *38*(1), 5–18. doi: 10.1007/s10643-010-0383-3

Roskos, K. A., Tabors, P. O., & Lenhart, L. A. (2009). *Oral language and early literacy in preschool: Talking, reading, and writing.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Sachs, J. (1987). Preschool boys' and girls' language use in pretend play. In S. U. Philips, S. Steele, & C. Tanz (Eds.), *Language, gender, and sex in comparative perspective.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sarama, J., & Clements, D. H. (2009). Building blocks and cognitive building blocks: Playing to know the world mathematically. *American Journal of Play*, *1*, 313–337. Retrieved from http://www.journalofplay.org/issues/1/3/article/building-blocks-and-cognitive-building-blocks-playing-know-world-mathematically

Schweinhart, L. J., & Weikart, D. P. (1997). The High/Scope Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study through age 23. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *12*, 117–143. doi: 10.1016/S0885-2006(97)90009-0

Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikart, D. (1993). Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age 27. *Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation,* 10.

Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through age 40: Summaries, conclusions, and frequently asked questions.* HighScope Press. Retrieved from http://highscope.org/file/specialsummary_rev2015_01.pdf

Singer, D. G., Golinkoff, R. M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (Eds.). (2006). *Play = Learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Slade, S., & Griffith, D. (2013). A whole child approach to student success. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, (KJEP Special Issue), 21–35.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R.E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.*), The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 443–466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R.E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Stipek, D. J., Feiler, R., Byler, P., Ryan, R., Milburn, S., & Salmon, J. M. (1998). Good beginnings: What difference does the program make in preparing young children for school*? Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 19,* 41–66. doi: 10.1016/S0193-3973(99)80027-6

Stipek, D. J., Feiler, R., Daniels, D., & Milburn, S. (1995). Effects of different instructional approaches on young children's achievement and motivation. *Child Development, 66,* 209–223. doi: 10.2307/1131201

Strauss, V. (2013, August 2). The disturbing shift underway in early childhood classrooms. *The Washington Post*. Washington DC. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/08/02/the-disturbing-shift-underway-in-early-childhood-classrooms/

Sunderman, G. L., Tracey, C. A., Kim, J., & Orfield, G. (2004). *Listening to teachers: Classroom realities and No Child Left Behind*. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Retrieved from https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/nclb-title-i/listening-to-teachers-classroom-realities-and-no-child-left-behind/sunderman-tracey-kim-orfield-listening-teachers.pdf

Sutton-Smith, B. (2001). *The ambiguity of play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Terzian, S. G. (n.d.). *Johann Comenius (1592–1670) - Contributions, Works.* Retrieved September 10, 2015, from http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1868/Comenius-Johann-1592-1670.html

Tullet, H. (2011). *Press here.* San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

Uzgalis, W. (2015). John Locke. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015). Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/locke/

Viadero, D. (2007, June). Teachers say NCLB has changed classroom practice. *Education Week*. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/06/20/42rand.h26.html?tkn=LQZFHPKa4x%2FqCmqiiStIMoHyfA2FOc3fkheQ&print=1

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wadsworth, B. J. (2004). *Piaget's theory of cognitive and affective development: Foundations of constructivism* (5th ed.). University of Michigan: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

Walsh, E.S. (1991). *Mouse count.* New York, NY: Voyager Books.

Weisberg, D. S., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013). Guided play: Where curricular goals meet a playful pedagogy. *Mind, Brain, and Education, 7*(2), 104–112. doi: 10.1111/mbe.12015

Weisberg, D. S., Kittredge, A. K., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., & Klahr, D. (2015). Making play work for education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 96*(8), 8–13. doi: 10.1177/0031721715583955

Weisberg, D. S., Zosh, J. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013). Talking it up: Play, language development, and the role of adult support. *American Journal of Play, 6*(1), 39–54. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1016058.pdf

Wilson, K. (2011). *Bear snores on.* New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books.

Wolcott, H.F. (2010). *Ethnography lessons: A primer.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zigler, E. F., & Bishop-Josef, S. J. (2006). The cognitive child versus the whole child: Lessons from 40 years of head start. In D. G. Singer, R. M. Golinkoff, & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.), *Play = Learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth* (pp. 15–35). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Zigler, E. F., Singer, D. G., & Bishop-Josef, S. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Children's play: The roots of reading*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

Zones of Regulation. (2016). Kuypers Consulting Inc. Retrieved from http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html

APPENDIX A: Support for Play Rubric

This rubric for high, medium, and low support for play was utilized in all phases of the research study (survey, interviews, observations) to identify and describe levels of support. The rubric categories were used to identify ideal cases from surveys for in-person interviews, and from interviews for case study observations.

Attribute = Line of Inquiry	Minimal Support	Adequate Support	Maximum Support
Teacher Perspective *Research Sub-Question: How do teachers view play and its relation to learning in the kindergarten classroom?* (DeVries, 2001; Drucker, Franklin, & Schecter, 2007)	Teaching philosophy (behaviorist) does not support child-initiated play.	Mixed or blended philosophy lends some support to play.	Teaching philosophy (constructivist, social-constructivist) supports play and learning through play.
	Views play as frivolous or unnecessary extra activity.	Views play as a break from academic work.	Views play as integral to learning.
	Does not integrate play as a vehicle for learning to meet kindergarten standards.	Expresses to use play as a reward or when all work is done.	Teacher embraces 'play as the work of the child' reports to integrate play as meaningful learning.
	Expresses view that there is no time to play in kindergarten.		Expresses view that play is mandatory in the kindergarten classroom as developmentally appropriate practice.
	Perceives to have no control or decision making power in the classroom.	Perceives to have some control and decision making power in the classroom.	Perceives to have final/ultimate control and decision making power in the classroom.

Opportunities for Play *Research Sub-Question: What opportunities for play are provided in kindergarten classrooms?* (Gronlund, 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009; DeVries, 2001)	Play is only allowed as a reward when work is completed. Some children are prevented from play as punishment or to complete academic tasks such as worksheets.	All children participate in play. At times, the teacher may use the play period to work one-on-one with a child or complete a task a child has missed due to absence.	All children participate in play. No other tasks take away from play.
	Play limited to one session per week (for example, Friday afternoon).	Play opportunities are provided at least two or three days each week.	Play opportunities are provided four or five days a week.
	Play sessions are short (30 minutes or less), preventing children from engaging in mature play.	Play sessions are moderate in length (30-45 minutes), allowing children to become engaged in mature play.	Play sessions are substantial in length (45+ minutes), allowing children to become fully engaged in mature play and experience 'flow' of play.
	Mostly teacher-directed or controlled, 'play-like' opportunities.	Mostly child-directed, self-selected free play. Minimal adult guidance.	Child initiated, child directed, teacher supported play. A mix of free play and guided play opportunities provided.

Play Environment *Research Sub-Question: How does the classroom environment provide for play?* (Gronlund, 2010; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2015)	Not enough space for teachers and children to move freely; crowding causes conflict among children.	Enough indoor space for children, staff, and basic furnishings for routines, play, and learning.	Ample indoor space allows children and teachers to circulate freely, and suitable space for activities in free play.
	Not enough basic furniture for routines, play, and learning.	Enough furniture for routines, play, and learning.	Ample furniture for routines, play, and learning. Some furniture for specific play activities.
	Most play areas so crowded, play cannot progress well.	A couple (2) play areas with sufficient space for the types of play encouraged by the materials.	Space is arranged so that classroom pathways generally do not interrupt play.
	Two (2) or less interest centers available and used by children during play.	A few (3) interest centers are available and used by the children during play.	Multiple (4+) interest centers are available and used by children during play.
	Poorly defined areas – environment does not provide clear signals and boundaries for use of materials.	Some defined areas for play and exploration.	Clearly defined and organized areas (ex: blocks, dramatic play, art, sensory table, manipulatives, library, writing table) provide clarity of purpose to children.
	Spaces for play are too small and create crowding of children attempting to access and engage with materials.	Some spaces large enough to accommodate group play, while other areas are too small and create some crowding.	Shelves and tables laid out to create a space large enough to accommodate three or four children.
	Materials are poorly organized and not accessible to children.	Some materials organized and accessible children. Teachers must assist in accessing some materials.	Materials are organized (bins, baskets, cubbies) and accessible by children.
	Limited diversity of materials available for use during play.	Some interesting materials available in some of the play areas.	A range of interesting materials are available in each of the play areas.
	Limited quantity of materials leads to conflict among children.	Adequate materials available in some of the spaces for children to use.	Enough materials are available for multiple children to use.
	No open-ended materials provided for play. All materials close-ended.	Some close-ended (puzzles, matching games) and some open-ended materials.	Many open-ended materials are provided for play.

Types of Play *Research Sub-Question: What types of play are present in kindergarten classrooms?* (Miller & Almon, 2009)	Only a few types of play (2-3) are observed in play scenarios. Small Motor Play Mastery Play Rules-Based Play Construction Play Make-Believe Play Symbolic Play Language Play Playing with Arts Sensory Play Other:	Some types of play (4-6) are observed in rich play scenarios. Small Motor Play Mastery Play Rules-Based Play Construction Play Make-Believe Play Symbolic Play Language Play Playing with Arts Sensory Play Other:	Multiple types of play (7-9) are observed in rich play scenarios. [Note: play types often overlap and combine] Small Motor Play (small toys and manipulatives like stringing beads, puzzles, sorting objects, Legos). Mastery Play (repeating an action over and over to mastery) Rules-based Play (making up own rules, social negotiation to adapt rules for play situation) Construction Play (building houses, ships, forts, and other structures) Make-Believe Play (also called pretend play – rich with language, problem solving, and imagination; follows child's narrative) Symbolic play (taking an object and converting it into a toy or prop through fluid process of imagination) Language Play (playing with words, rhymes, verses, and songs; telling stories and dramatizing them) Playing with Arts (integrating forms of art into play, drawing, modeling, creating music, performing puppet shows; to express feelings and ideas) Sensory play (playing with dirt, sand, mud, water, and materials with different textures, sounds, and smells to develop senses) Other:

Role of the Teacher *Research Sub-Question: How do kindergarten teachers support play and learning through play?* (Drucker, Franklin, & Schecter, 2007)	Before Play: No intentional planning for play goals beyond providing materials.	Before Play: Plans for some play areas, considering goals and materials needed to meet those goals.	Before Play: Plans for each play area by including goals for each area and materials needed to meet those goals.
	Before/During Play: No clear structure for choices available. Laizze-faire, anything goes. No rules or guidelines appear in place, leading to chaotic or overly simplistic play.	Before/During Play: Some structure for delineating choices. Some rules and guidelines appear in place.	Before/During Play: Intentional and clear structure for delineating choices available each day. Developing rules or guidelines to ensure safety and high-level play.
	During Play: Initiating, directing, and controlling play so children have little choice.	During Play: Initiating play when needed, but staying involved as a co-player too long that children do not take initiative to direct play.	During Play: Initiating play as needed to help get children started, then withdrawing from play to allow children to direct play.
	During Play: Responding to play by taking away control or choice when children are not being productive, rather than guiding them to higher levels of play.	During Play: Responding to play by limiting, rushing, or stopping play; resolving conflict for children which could possibly resolve itself; setting limits on play.	During Play: Responding to play to ensure safety and productive, high-levels of play. Inquiring or commenting on play. Being present and observing and accepting children's play.
	After Play: No reflection or follow-up is conducted after play experiences.	After Play: Documenting play. Changing and adding materials.	After Play: Discussing play with children. Talking about and planning for next play session with children.

APPENDIX B: Kindergarten Play Survey

The purpose of this survey is to collect information on how kindergarten teachers are supporting play and learning through play in the classroom. Your honest responses are necessary for the researcher to capture an accurate picture of how play is incorporated to support student learning. This survey should take you 10-15 minutes to complete. Thank you for your valuable time.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM Per the Institutional Review Board (IRB), this form is required for academic researchers conducting research with human subjects. The IRB helps ensure studies are conducted in an ethical manner and will not bring harm to participants.

Research Study Title: Support for Play in Public School Kindergarten Classrooms: A Descriptive Multiple-Case Study
Principle Investigator: Elizabeth Docken
Research Institution: Concordia University – Portland, Oregon
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jerry McGuire

Purpose and what you will be doing: The purpose of this survey is to understand kindergarten teacher perspectives on play and the supports for play in kindergarten classrooms. No one will be paid to be in the study. To be in the study, participants will complete an online survey and indicate via the survey a willingness to participate in further study data collection through in-person interviews and classroom observations. Completing the survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time.

Risks: There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption. When the researcher looks at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. Non-identifying codes will be utilized to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private and will be destroyed when the study is over.

Benefits: Information you provide will help the researcher to understand supports for play in public school kindergarten classrooms and the perspective of kindergarten teachers on play. Your input is greatly valued as it adds to building an accurate picture of how play is supported by teachers in the district.

Confidentiality: This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is greatly appreciated, but you are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating.

Contact Information: You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principle investigator, Elizabeth Docken, by email at edocken2@gmail.com (personal) or edocken@pps.net (school). If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the investigator's advisor, Dr. Jerry McGuire (jmcguire@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6596) or the director of the CU-institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study. By selecting "Yes" and completing the Survey, you are authorizing your consent to be a participant in the study and for your information to be collected by the researcher.

Please download a copy of the Informed Consent form here for your records. (See Appendix E. Informed Consent Online Survey.)

1) Consent to Participate
- ❍ Yes, I volunteer to participate in the study. [Type YES in the box to serve as online signature.] _____
- ❍ No, I do not consent.

Skip Logic: If No, I do not consent. Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

This section contains demographic questions.

2) Gender
- ❍ Male
- ❍ Female

3) What race/ethnicity best describes you?
- ❍ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ❍ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ❍ Black or African American
- ❍ Hispanic American
- ❍ White/Caucasian
- ❍ Multiple Ethnicity/Other (please specify) _____

4) Highest Degree Earned
- ❍ Bachelors (BA/BS)
- ❍ Masters (MA/MS)
- ❍ Doctorates (PhD/EdD)

5) Was any of your educational training specific to early childhood?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Display This Question:
If: Was any of your educational training specific to early childhood? Yes Is Selected

6) How many college courses (not credits) were specific to early childhood education? (estimate to the best of your knowledge)
- ❍ 1 course
- ❍ 2 courses
- ❍ 3 courses
- ❍ 4 courses
- ❍ 5 or more courses

7) Total Number of Years Teaching
- ❍ 1 year
- ❍ 2-5 years
- ❍ 6-10 years
- ❍ 11-15 years
- ❍ 16 or more years

8) Number of Years Teaching Kindergarten
- ❍ 1 year
- ❍ 2-5 years
- ❍ 6-10 years
- ❍ 11-15 years
- ❍ 16 or more years

9) Number of Years in District
- ❍ 1 year
- ❍ 2-5 years
- ❍ 6-10 years
- ❍ 11-15 years
- ❍ 16 or more years

10) Number of Years at Current School
- ❍ 1 year
- ❍ 2-5 years
- ❍ 6-10 years
- ❍ 11-15 years
- ❍ 16 or more years

The following statements and questions have been designed to understand teacher perspectives and attitudes on play and playful learning as part of the kindergarten instructional program in public schools. Please answer honestly based on what you believe to be true for you in your current placement.

Teacher Perspectives

11) The existing kindergarten instructional program fits with what I believe is the "ideal" kindergarten program.
- ❍ Strongly agree
- ❍ Somewhat agree
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree
- ❍ Somewhat disagree
- ❍ Strongly disagree

12) I am allowed to make decisions about how to implement the kindergarten instructional program in my own classroom.
- ❍ Strongly agree
- ❍ Somewhat agree
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree
- ❍ Somewhat disagree
- ❍ Strongly disagree

13) I integrate play as a vehicle for learning to meet kindergarten learning standards.
- ❍ Strongly agree
- ❍ Somewhat agree
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree
- ❍ Somewhat disagree
- ❍ Strongly disagree

14) What is the primary role of play in your kindergarten classroom?

- ❍ Play is a break from work and motivation to finish academic work.
- ❍ Play is a way to make academic tasks more appealing.
- ❍ Play is a means to further social and emotional development.
- ❍ Play is a means to integrate social, emotional, moral, and intellectual development goals.

15) How do you view play as it relates to learning in kindergarten?

- ❍ Play and learning are two different things. There is a time for play and a time for the work of academic learning.
- ❍ Play and learning can go together. Kindergarten children learn some skills and knowledge through playful activities.
- ❍ Play and learning are complementary and must go together. Kindergarten children learn through play and demonstrate what they have learned through play.

Play Environment

16) My classroom environment (room design, furniture, layout, etc.) provides adequate space for play activities.

- ❍ Strongly agree
- ❍ Somewhat agree
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree
- ❍ Somewhat disagree
- ❍ Strongly disagree

17) My classroom environment provides a range of interesting materials in ample quantities for children to use during play activities.

- ❍ Strongly agree
- ❍ Somewhat agree
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree
- ❍ Somewhat disagree
- ❍ Strongly disagree

18) My classroom has clearly defined and organized areas (ex: blocks area, dramatic play area, writing table, interest centers) to support play activities.

- ❍ Strongly agree
- ❍ Somewhat agree
- ❍ Neither agree nor disagree
- ❍ Somewhat disagree
- ❍ Strongly disagree

Opportunities for Play

19) I incorporate playful learning in my instructional program.

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Display This Question:
If I incorporate playful learning in my instructional program; Yes Is Selected

20) How often is playful learning (choice time/interest centers) integrated in your classroom in an average week? [NOT including recess or PE]

- ❍ Once a week.
- ❍ Two or three times a week.
- ❍ Four or more times each week.

Display This Question:
If I incorporate playful learning in my instructional program; Yes Is Selected

21) On a typical day, how long is each play period (choice time/interest centers) on average? [NOT including recess or PE]

- ❍ 0-15 minutes
- ❍ 15-30 minutes
- ❍ 30-45 minutes
- ❍ 45 minutes or more

22) Play/choice time/center time in my classroom is:

- ❍ Mostly child-directed, self-selected free play
- ❍ A blend of child-initiated play and adult-guided experiences
- ❍ Mostly adult-guided (i.e. teacher-created) playful learning activities

Types of Play

23) What types of play take place in your classroom? (select all that apply)

	Yes	No
Small Motor Play (e.g. play with small toys and manipulatives like stringing beads, puzzles, sorting objects, Legos)	❍	❍
Mastery Play (repeating an action over and over to mastery, such as making dozens of bows for birthday packages)	❍	❍
Rules-based Play (making up own rules, social negotiation to adapt rules for play situation)	❍	❍
Construction Play (e.g. building houses, ships, forts, and other structures)	❍	❍
Make-Believe Play (also called pretend play; begins with “Let’s pretend” and follows child’s narrative or story)	❍	❍
Symbolic play (children taking an object and converting it into a toy or prop through fluid process of fantasy or imagination)	❍	❍
Language Play (e.g. playing with words, rhymes, verses, and songs; telling stories and dramatizing them)	❍	❍
Playing with Arts (e.g. integrating forms of art into play, drawing, modeling, creating music, performing puppet shows; explore arts to express feelings and ideas)	❍	❍
Sensory play (e.g. playing with dirt, sand, mud, water, and materials with different textures, sounds, and smells to develop senses)	❍	❍
Other (describe)	❍	❍

Role of the Teacher

24) How do you prepare *before play* in your classroom? (select all that apply)

	Yes	No
Providing space (setting up centers, choice areas)	❍	❍
Providing time (a set time in the day/week allocated to choice/play)	❍	❍
Providing materials (open-ended materials, imaginative play props, etc.)	❍	❍
Delineating choices available (from "everything open" to specifying choices)	❍	❍
Asking children to choose or assigning children to activities	❍	❍
Developing rules for choice/play (ex: limiting number of students in each area, limiting length of time in each area, assigning play buddies, etc.)	❍	❍
Other (please specify)	❍	❍

25) How do you provide support *during play* in your classroom? (select all that apply)

	Yes	No
Initiating play by making activity suggestions	❍	❍
Initiating play by making material suggestions	❍	❍
Providing suggestions to specific children about what to play	❍	❍
Responding to play by limiting or stopping play	❍	❍
Helping resolve conflict	❍	❍
Helping play proceed, setting limits, or answering questions	❍	❍
Inquiring or commenting on play	❍	❍
Being present; observing and accepting play	❍	❍
Other (please specify)	❍	❍

26) How do you provide support *after play* experiences? (select all that apply)

	Yes	No
Talking about and discussing play with children	❍	❍
Allowing material to stay in place to continue play	❍	❍
Documenting play via photos, videos, or document displays	❍	❍
Talking about and discussing the next play session with children	❍	❍
Other (please specify)	❍	❍

27) When children are engaged in play/centers/choice time, what is your primary role? (rank from 1 being what you do the most to 4 being what you do the least)

_____ I monitor behavior and discipline children if conflicts arise

_____ I instruct children in how to do different activities and observe children that they are on-task

_____ I observe children, direct tasks, manage materials, and help keep order during choice/center time

_____ I engage with children in play activities, wondering aloud and posing questions to promote reasoning

28) Additional Comments - Do you have anything else to add on the topic that has not been captured by the questions on this survey? Please feel free to add your thoughts here. Thank you.

Consent to Interview

29) Consent to be contacted for Interview:
Following this survey, the researcher will be contacting teachers to participate in one-on-one, in-person interviews to provide additional information on how you integrate play and playful learning in the classroom. The interview will take about an hour of your time and can be conducted at your convenience (location and time to be determined by researcher and interviewee). If you consent to be contacted for an interview, you will be entered for a chance to win a Starbucks gift card as a show of appreciation. Please indicate your willingness to participate in the next phase of this research study.

❍ No, thank you.
❍ Yes, I integrate play and am willing to participate in an interview.

Display This Question:
If Consent to be contacted for Interview. Yes, I Integrate play and am willing to participate in an interview. Is selected.

30) Name (first and last)

Display This Question:
If Consent to be contacted for Interview. Yes, I Integrate play and am willing to participate in an interview. Is selected.

31) School Email Address

Display This Question:
If Consent to be contacted for Interview. Yes, I Integrate play and am willing to participate in an interview. Is selected.

32) School Site for 2016-2017 School Year

Display This Question:
If Consent to be contacted for Interview. Yes, I Integrate play and am willing to participate in an interview. Is selected.

33) Phone Number (a cell number or home number is preferred, as interviews may be conducted after school is out for the summer)

Display This Question:
If Consent to be contacted for Interview. No, thank you. Is selected.

34) What is the primary reason you do not want to participate in a one-on-one interview?

- ❍ I don't integrate play in my classroom.
- ❍ I integrate play with learning, but could be much better in my implementation.
- ❍ I don't have the time.
- ❍ I'm just not interested.
- ❍ Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX C: Teacher Interview Questions

Interview participants were interviewed in a one-on-one setting, primarily the university library or public library, which both offered private study rooms. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant permission and the researcher took written notes. The researcher informed participants of the purpose of the study and received a signed informed consent before conducting the interview. During interviews, additional follow-up questions were asked based on interviewee responses.

1) How long have you taught kindergarten here? In other places?
2) What is your background in education?
3) What is the overall instructional program for kindergarten in your school? How well does the existing instructional program fit with what you believe is the "ideal" kindergarten program?
4) How are decisions made about curriculum, room design, materials available, etc.? How are changes made within the program?
5) What influences the decisions you make about your instructional program? Specific to the focus of this research, the decision to allow for play?
6) What is your definition of play? How do you think others, such as parents or administrators, think of play in schools/classrooms?
7) How do you view the role of play in kindergarten?
8) What do you see as your instructional role in supporting play?
9) What types of play take place in your classroom? How do these types of play support student learning? What kinds of play would you like to see take place?
10) How do you see play relating to learning in kindergarten? Play and standards?
11) How much choice of play activities do children have in your classroom? What kind of options are provided to children allowing for choice in play?
12) Do you see any constraints or challenges in meeting the needs of your students and the requirements of your state/district/school?
13) Do you have anything else to add on the topic of play?

APPENDIX D: Observation Checklist

The observation checklist guided researcher field notes in the three selected case study classrooms. Two full days of observation were completed in each case study classroom. Following the first day of observation, the researcher checked off indicators observed and highlighted indicators not observed. On the second day of observation, the researcher looked for highlighted indicators.

The observational categories for teacher activities before, during, and after play were developed by Drucker, Franklin, & Schecter (2007) for the Kindergarten Play Study, conducted for the Alliance for Childhood, and were adapted to meet the needs of this study. The role of the teacher and the activities in which the teacher engages are indicators of the level and extent to which child-initiated play is guided by the teacher. Providing opportunities for play is listed as an indicator "before play" on the observation checklist.

The types of play were selected from Miller & Almon (2009) specific to the types likely to be observed in the classroom versus on the playground or in the gym.

The play environment indicators were drawn from Harms, Clifford, and Cryer (2015) and Gronlund (2010) to describe how play is supported through the physical environment, layout, and materials available for play.

Teacher: Location: Day/Time:

Role of the Teacher	**Types of Play**	**Play Environment**
Before Play Providing time (Opportunities for play)	Small Motor Play	Ample indoor space allows children and teachers to circulate freely, and suitable space provided for activities in free play
Providing space	Mastery Play	Ample furniture for routines, play, and learning. Some furniture for specific play activities
Providing materials	Rules-based Play	Multiple soft furnishings accessible to children during play
Delineating choices available	Construction Play	Space is arranged so that classroom pathways generally do not interrupt play
Asking children to choose or assigning children to activities	Make-Believe Play	Multiple (4+) interest centers are available and used by children during play
Developing rules for choice/play	Symbolic play	Teachers can adequately supervise all children visually most of the time
During Play Initiating Play: • Teacher-led activity with pretense *(e.g. this is a bakery today)* • Teacher-led pretense *(e.g. this is a cupcake)* • Suggestions about play	Language Play	Clearly defined and organized areas provide a sense of security and clarity of purpose to children
Responding to Play: • Limiting, rushing, or stopping play • Helping resolve conflict • Helping play proceed, setting limits, answering questions • Inquiring or commenting on play • Being present, observing, accepting play	Playing with Arts	Shelves and tables laid out to create a space large enough to accommodate three or four children
After Play Talking about and discussing play with children	Sensory play	A range of interesting materials are available in each of the play areas
Allowing material to stay in place to continue play	Other Types/forms of play observed	Many open-ended materials are provided for play
Documenting play	Non-Play Activities • Teacher-initiated projects • Assigned participation or selected participation in non-play/close-ended activity, such as a reading group or completing an academic task	Materials are organized (bins, baskets, cubbies) and accessible by children
Talking about and discussing the next play session with children	Miscellaneous or Ambiguous Activities Not possible to determine if child activity is playful	Enough materials are available for multiple children to use

APPENDIX E: Informed Consent Form

Research Study Title: Support for Play in Public School Kindergarten Classrooms: A Descriptive Multiple-Case Study
Principle Investigator: Elizabeth Docken
Research Institution: Concordia University – Portland, Oregon
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jerry McGuire

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this survey is to understand kindergarten teacher perspectives on play and the supports for play in kindergarten classrooms. No one will be paid to be in the study. To be in the study, participants will complete an online survey and indicate via the survey a willingness to participate in further study data collection through in-person interviews and classroom observations. Completing the survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption. When the researcher looks at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. Non-identifying codes will be utilized to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private and will be destroyed when the study is over.

Benefits:
Information you provide will help the researcher understand supports for play in public school kindergarten classrooms and the perspective of kindergarten teachers on play. Your input is greatly valued as it adds to building an accurate picture of how play is supported by teachers in the district.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but you are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principle investigator, Elizabeth Docken, by email at edocken2@gmail.com (personal) or edocken@pps.net (school). If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the investigator's advisor, Dr. Jerry McGuire (jmcguire@cu-

portland.edu or call 503-493-6596) or the director of the CU-institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

[survey required online signature prior to answering questions]

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date

APPENDIX F: Portraiture 1 Play Environment Photographs

These photographs were taken in Marie's classroom on the first visit in October 2016. They evidence a well-organized work and play environment, organized play materials, and defined interest centers. Photographs from classroom observations were used in conjunction with researcher field notes to evaluate each case study on the attributes of the play environment.

Figure 3. The classroom is organized with four kidney-shaped tables for work time in the middle of the space. Play materials and interest centers are organized around the perimeter of the room. Two carpeted meeting spaces are used for whole group sessions, with one seen in the photograph in the back left corner of the room. The teacher easel and chair are in front of the meeting space.

Figure 4. Materials for work and play are organized, color-coded, labeled, and accessible to the children. Shelves hold table materials in color-coded containers, such as pens, scissors, and crayons. Baskets and drawers contain many of the play materials used during free choice time.

Figure 5. Play materials with "Smiley Faces" show number limit of children. Materials for free choice play times were organized around the perimeter of the room. All play areas had a set limit for the space or materials in the space, with the "smiley faces" representing how many children were limited to the materials or the space. These large drawer tubs of Legos and other building type materials were pulled out and used on the carpeted meeting area nearby.

Figure 6. The dramatic play corner had a kitchen, a small table, chairs, a high chair, and a baby bassinet. Materials for the space are organized in baskets. Students were observed cleaning up at the end of each play session to keep the space tidy. Both boys and girls were observed playing in the dramatic play corner over the course of the two days of observations.

Figure 7. A large tripod magnifying glass, smaller hand-held magnifying glasses, and a variety of specimens were available at the Nature Table Interest Center. Specimens included a sunflower, leaves, rocks, bark, and branches. All materials in the space were kept organized in a tub on the nature table when not in use.

Figure 8. While not a play area, the Feelings Space is a defined area for students who are upset or sad or lonely. It contains books, squishy toys, snuggly friends, putty, and tools to help with breathing. The bean bag space is for processing feelings before returning to work and play.

APPENDIX G: Portraiture 2 Play Environment Photographs

These photographs were taken in Wendy's classroom on the first observation visit in October 2016. They provide evidence of a well-organized environment with spaces created for work and play. Materials are in labeled bins throughout the room that are used in play areas, interest centers, and for work sessions. The photographs were used in conjunction with researcher field notes from the classroom observations to evaluate each case study on the attribute of the play environment.

Figure 9. The work and play environment is organized with six round tables for work time in the center of the classroom. Play materials and interest centers are organized around the room's perimeter.

Figure 10. A large carpeted meeting space is used for whole group instruction. Students have assigned squares on the colorful carpet. A teaching chair and easel (not seen in picture) sit in front of the group meeting space. The area is used for construction materials such as Lincoln Logs and Legos during choice time.

Figure 11. Materials for the Writing-Art Center are labeled and organized behind a kidney-shaped table and accessible for children to use during choice time. Baskets are labeled for envelopes, paper, glue sticks, stickers, staplers, crayons, hole punchers, scissors, and more.

Figure 12. A variety of materials are organized in labeled bins and available to children to use during choice time. The tubs are pulled out on the round tables for use. During observations, the castle on top and a small basket of knights, horses, and other such figurines were used by the children.

Figure 13. An abundance of well-organized dramatic play materials were accessible and used by children in the dramatic play corner of the room. A large indoor space allowed the teacher to designate an entire corner of the classroom for pretend play, defined by a large carpet. As shown in the top right corner of the photograph, the teacher posted number limits for each play space. Five children were the limit in the dramatic play corner.

Figure 14. The dramatic play corner had a kitchen, dollhouse, shopping cart, and bean bag chairs. Materials for the space were organized in large laundry baskets and labeled by kind, as shown in the previous picture. The space was used primarily by girls during the two observation days. On the second observation, one boy was observed with a group of girls in the dramatic play corner.

Figure 15. A space in the room called the Break Zone was dedicated for calming down and processing feelings. Sensory tools in the bench were accessible for students to use as needed. While the researcher observed a student with sensory needs being accommodated during whole group instruction, the Break Zone Area was not observed in use during classroom observations.

APPENDIX H: Portraiture 3 Play Environment Photographs

These photographs were taken in Sarah's classroom on the initial observation visit in October 2016. They evidence an organized work and play environment and play materials accessible for children in both play areas and interest centers. Photographs were used to supplement researcher field notes to evaluate each case study on the attribute of the play environment.

Figure 16. The classroom contained four long rectangular tables for student work time, a kidney shaped table for small groups, and a long rectangular standing table in the art corner. One small carpet area was located adjacent to the backpack hooks on one side of the room, while the whole group meeting area was in the front corner of the room (not pictured).

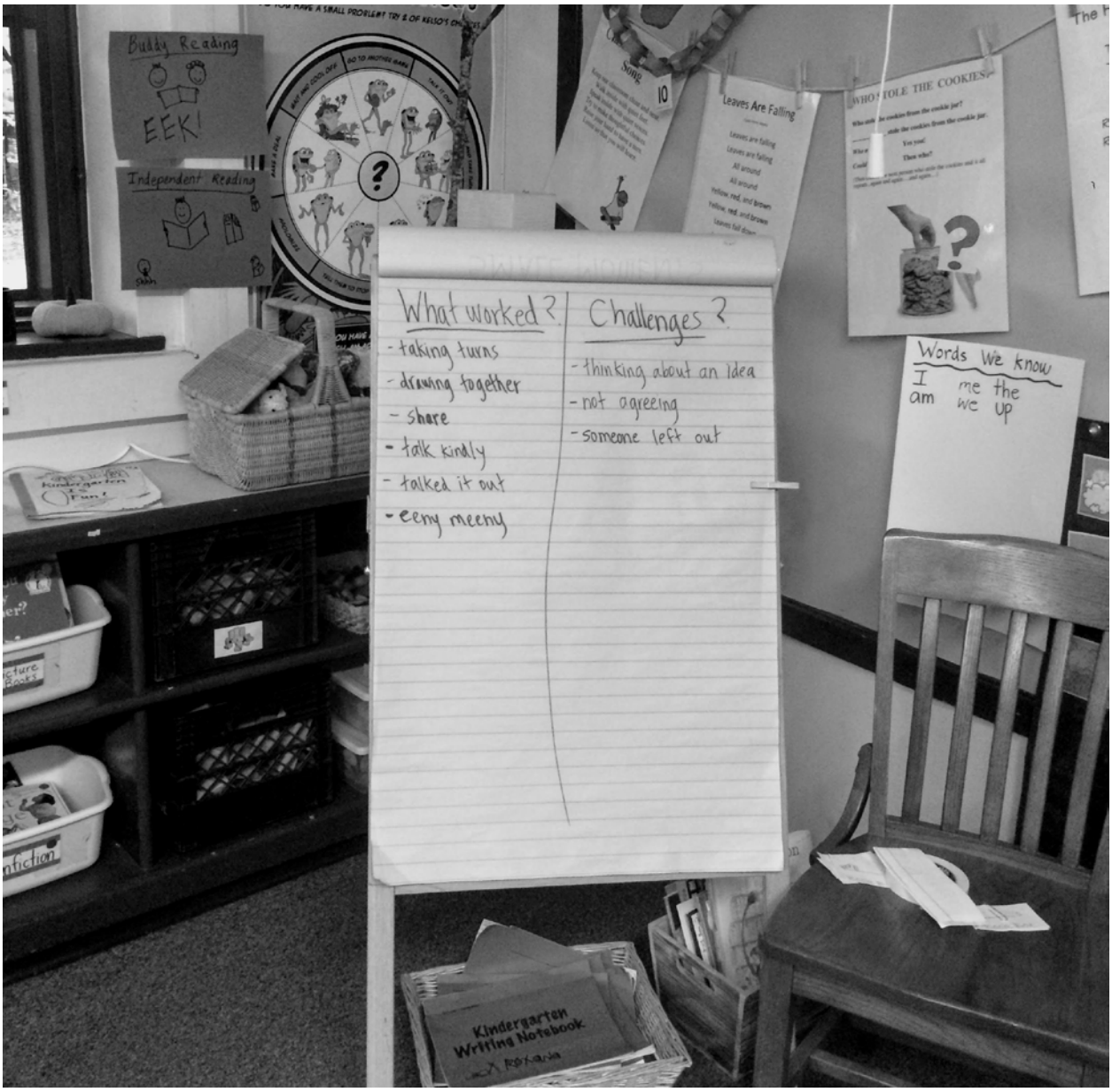


Figure 17. The group meeting space was in the front of the room by the calendar and teaching easel. It was used for whole group instruction during work periods, for math partner games, and for block building during choice time. Behind the teaching easel on the wall, a variety of songs and chants the students learned during the year are visible. On the easel are student reflections regarding a collaborative drawing project.

Figure 18. Most materials in the room were organized into labeled bins and baskets. On the shelves, from left to right, are puzzles and dramatic play materials, math manipulatives, the current math center games, and writing materials. Students' book boxes on the top of the shelf contain individual reading material.

Figure 19. In addition to the district-mandated math curriculum's materials, the classroom contained a variety of additional small motor materials to support math goals on counting, patterns, and shapes. During math centers, both district-provided materials and supplementary materials were used for games and activities.

Figure 20. The classroom had a well-developed pretend play area (dramatic play corner). The toy kitchen sat in the middle, with a kitchen/dining area to the right and a space to the left with pillows and chairs that the students were observed to use as a living room/bedroom in their play. The laundry basket contained dress up materials.

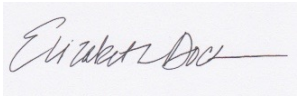
Figure 21. To the right of the toy kitchen, a small table and two small chairs created a dining room. A doll stroller, bassinet, high chair, and shopping cart were available and used by the students. On the bottom shelf in fabric bins were dramatic play materials, such as pots, pans, dishes, plastic food, dolls, and doll dress up clothes.

Figure 22. The art corner contained an easel, smocks, a standing art table, and a sink. Materials for art projects were brought out by the teacher. This space was observed to be used primarily for adult-directed or guided activities. On the second observation day in January, students were observed using the art table for a "Creation Station," making structures out of cardboard, toilet paper rolls, and tape.

APPENDIX I: Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Digital Signature: 

Name: Elizabeth Docken

Date: April 17, 2017